

# Notes on Leviticus

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**Dr. Thomas L. Constable**

## Introduction

### TITLE

The Hebrews derived the title of this book from the first word in it, *wayyiqra'*, translated "And He [the Lord] called" (1:1). "And" or "then" is a conjunction that shows that what follows in Leviticus is a continuation of the narrative of Exodus. There is no break in the flow of thought. This is the third book of the Torah (Law).

The English title comes to us from the Vulgate (Latin version), which called this book *Liber Leviticus*. The Vulgate title came from the Septuagint (Greek version), which had as the title *Leuitikon*, meaning "relating to the Levites." This title is appropriate since the book contains requirements of the Mosaic Covenant that relate to the Levites, or more specifically, the priests.

"It would be wrong, however, to describe Leviticus simply as a manual for priests. It is equally, if not more, concerned with the part the laity should play in worship. Many of the regulations explain what the layman should sacrifice. They tell him when to go to the sanctuary, what to bring, and what he may expect the priest to do when he arrives. Most of the laws apply to all Israel: only a few sections specifically concern the priests alone, e.g., chs. 21—22. The lay orientation of the legislation is particularly noticeable in ch. 23, where the whole emphasis lies on the days that must be observed as days of sabbath rest."<sup>1</sup>

### DATE AND WRITER

As I explained in the notes on Genesis, almost all Jewish and Christian scholars regarded Moses as the writer of all five books of the Law until about 100 years ago.<sup>2</sup>

God evidently revealed the material Moses recorded in Leviticus after He renewed the covenant with Israel (1:1; cf. Exod. 34:1-28).

Leviticus is unique in that it is largely a record of God's instructions to Moses.

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<sup>1</sup>Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup>See the excellent discussion and critique of the Documentary Hypothesis in Mark F. Rooker, *Leviticus*, pp. 23-38.

"There is no book in the whole compass of that inspired Volume which the Holy Spirit has given us, that contains more of the very words of God than Leviticus. It is God that is the direct speaker in almost every page; His gracious words are recorded in the form wherein they were uttered."<sup>3</sup>

### **SCOPE**

As mentioned, Leviticus contains revelation that was particularly appropriate for the priests. While ritual and legal matters predominate, Moses wove them into the historical narratives so as one reads Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers in order there is chronological movement forward. As we shall see, the legislation appears in the narrative at significant and reasonable places.

"The content of Leviticus supplements and completes that of Exodus in the religious and social spheres—and particularly the religious and ritual aspects of the covenant as made, broken and renewed actually at Sinai; this would be reflected by the terminal blessings and curses of Leviticus 26."<sup>4</sup>

"Leviticus enlarges upon matters involving the ordering of worship at the divine sanctuary that are mentioned only briefly in Exodus. Whereas the latter described the specifications and construction of the tabernacle, Leviticus narrates the way in which the priests are to care for the sanctuary and throne room of the Great King. The work is a fundamentally important legal treatise because it contains the regulations by which the religious and civil life of the Hebrew nation was to be governed once the land of Canaan was occupied."<sup>5</sup>

Historically the book fits within the one month between God's occupation of the tabernacle (Exod. 40:17, 34-38) and the taking of the census at Sinai (Num. 1:1-3). However because it contains so much legal material, we should consider it along with the rest of the Mosaic Law that God began to reveal in Exodus.

"It carries on to its completion the giving of the law at Sinai, which commenced at Ex. 25, and by which the covenant constitution was firmly established."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Andrew A. Bonar, *A Commentary on Leviticus*, p. 1. For a fuller discussion of authorship and date, see R. K. Harrison, *Leviticus*, pp. 15-25, Wenham, pp. 8-13; or Allan P. Ross, *Holiness to the LORD*, pp. 33-42.

<sup>4</sup>Kenneth Kitchen, "The Old Testament in its Context: 2 From Egypt to the Jordan," *Theological Students' Fellowship Bulletin* 60 (1971):3.

<sup>5</sup>Harrison, pp. 13-14.

<sup>6</sup>C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, 2:261.

## **PURPOSE**

"Though the covenant arrangement up to this point clearly specified the need for Israel, the vassal, to appear before her Lord on stated occasions and singled out first Moses and then the priesthood as mediators in this encounter, there yet remained the need to describe the nature of the tribute to be presented, the precise meaning and function of the priesthood, the definition of holiness and unholiness, and a more strict clarification of the places and times of pilgrimage to the dwelling place of the great King. This is the purpose of the book of Leviticus."<sup>7</sup>

"The central theme of the book is holiness. The book intends to show how Israel was to fulfill its covenant responsibility to be 'a kingdom of priests and a holy nation' (Ex 19:6; Lev 26:5)."<sup>8</sup>

"How to maintain the vital covenantal relationship between the Israelites and their God is the concern of the book of Leviticus."<sup>9</sup>

"New Testament theology makes full use of the idea of holiness. All Christians are holy, 'saints' in most English translations. That is, they have been called by God to be his people just as ancient Israel had been (Col. 1:2; 1 Pet. 1:2; 2:9-10; cf. Exod. 19:5-6). But this state of holiness must find expression in holy living (Col. 1:22; 1 Pet. 1:15). Sanctification is expressed through obedience to the standard of teaching (Rom. 6:17-19), just as in Leviticus through obedience to the law. Peter urges his readers to make the motto of Leviticus their own: 'Be holy, for I am holy' (1 Pet. 1:16). The imitation of God is a theme that unites the ethics of Old and New Testaments (cf. Matt. 5:48; 1 Cor. 11:1)."<sup>10</sup>

". . . the principles underlying the OT are valid and authoritative for the Christian, but the particular applications found in the OT may not be. The moral principles are the same today, but insofar as our situation often differs from the OT setting, the application of the principles in our society may well be different now."<sup>11</sup>

". . . the Levitical rituals are still of immense relevance. It was in terms of these sacrifices that Jesus himself and the early church understood his atoning death. Leviticus provided the theological models for their understanding. If we wish to walk in our Lord's steps and think his thoughts after him, we must attempt to understand the sacrificial system of Leviticus. It was established by the same God who sent his Son to die for

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<sup>7</sup>Eugene H. Merrill, "A Theology of the Pentateuch," in *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 56.

<sup>8</sup>John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, p. 323.

<sup>9</sup>Samuel J. Schultz, *Leviticus: God Among His People*, p. 7.

<sup>10</sup>Wenham, p. 25.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 35.

us; and in rediscovering the principles of OT worship written there, we may learn something of the way we should approach a holy God."<sup>12</sup>

### **GENRE**

Leviticus is essentially a narrative document that relates the events that transpired in the life of the Israelites while the nation camped at the base of Mt. Sinai. However most of the material in the book is legal in genre. The legal sections prepare the reader to understand the narrative sections not only in Leviticus but also in Numbers and the rest of the Bible. There are two clear narrative sections (chs. 8—10; 24:10-23). However the hinge chapter in the book, chapter 16, reads as narrative even though it is legislative (legal) material.

- A      Legal chs. 1—7
- B      Narrative chs. 8—10
- A      Legal chs. 11—15
- C      Legal written as narrative ch. 16
- A      Legal 17:1—24:9
- B      Narrative 24:10-23
- A      Legal chs. 25—27

### **IMPORTANCE**

". . . it is no exaggeration to claim that the Book of Leviticus has had more impact on Judaism than any other book of the Old testament. Traditionally it was the first book taught to Jewish children, and over half the commentary of the Talmud is concerned with understanding its contents."<sup>13</sup>

### **OUTLINE**

"At first sight the book of Leviticus might appear to be a haphazard, even repetitious arrangement of enactments involving the future life in Canaan of the Israelite people. Closer examination will reveal, however, that quite apart from the division of the work into two basic themes, many of the chapters have their own literary structure. Examples of this can be seen in material patterned after the fashion of a Mesopotamian tablet, with its title, textual content and colophon, as in Leviticus 1:3—7:37-38.<sup>14</sup> Other chapters exhibit a distinct form of construction, which would doubtless prove extremely valuable for purposes of memorizing the contents. Examples of this are to be found in the triadic pattern of the leprosy regulations introduced by the phrase 'The Lord said to Moses' (Lv. 13:1;

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>13</sup>Rooker, p. 22. See also Ross, pp. 42-58, for discussion of the main theological revelations in Leviticus, and pp. 58-65 for explanation of the interpretation and application of the Law in the church.

<sup>14</sup>A colophon is an inscription, usually at the end of an ancient book, giving facts about its production.

14:1, 33), or the concentric arrangement of propositions (palistrophe) in Leviticus 24:16-22. A particularly attractive literary form is the introverted (chiastic) passage occurring in Leviticus 15:2-30, suggesting considerable artistic ability on the part of the writer."<sup>15</sup>

- I. The public worship of the Israelites chs. 1—16
  - A. The laws of sacrifice chs. 1—7
    - 1. The burnt offering ch. 1
    - 2. The meal offering ch. 2
    - 3. The peace offerings ch. 3
    - 4. The sin offerings 4:1—5:13
    - 5. The trespass offerings 5:14—6:7
    - 6. Instructions for the priests concerning the offerings 6:8—7:38
  - B. The institution of the Aaronic priesthood chs. 8—10
    - 1. The consecration of the priests and the sanctuary ch. 8
    - 2. The entrance of Aaron and his sons into their office ch. 9
    - 3. The sanctification of the priesthood ch. 10
  - C. Laws relating to ritual cleanliness chs. 11—15
    - 1. Uncleanness due to contact with certain animals ch. 11
    - 2. Uncleanness due to childbirth ch. 12
    - 3. Uncleanness due to skin and covering abnormalities chs. 13—14
    - 4. Uncleanness due to bodily discharges associated with reproduction ch. 15
  - D. The Day of Atonement ch. 16
    - 1. Introductory information 16:1-10
    - 2. Instructions concerning the ritual 16:11-28
    - 3. Instructions concerning the duty of the people 16:29-34
- II. The private worship of the Israelites chs. 17—27
  - A. Holiness of conduct on the Israelites' part chs. 17—20
    - 1. Holiness of food ch. 17
    - 2. Holiness of the marriage relationship ch. 18
    - 3. Holiness of behavior toward God and man ch. 19
    - 4. Punishments for serious crimes ch. 20

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<sup>15</sup>Harrison, p. 15.

- B. Holiness of the priests, gifts, and sacrifices chs. 21—22
  - 1. The first list of regulations for priests 21:1-15
  - 2. The second list of regulations for priests 21:16-24
  - 3. The third list of regulations for priests ch. 22
- C. Sanctification of the Sabbath and the feasts of Yahweh ch. 23
  - 1. The Sabbath 23:1-3
  - 2. The Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread 23:4-8
  - 3. The Feast of Firstfruits 23:9-14
  - 4. The Feast of Pentecost 23:15-22
  - 5. The Feast of Trumpets 23:23-25
  - 6. The Day of Atonement 23:26-32
  - 7. The Feast of Tabernacles 23:33-44
- D. The preparation of the holy lamps and showbread 24:1-9
- E. The punishment of a blasphemer 24:10-23
- F. Sanctification of the possession of land by the sabbatical and jubilee years ch. 25
  - 1. The sabbatical year 25:1-7
  - 2. The year of jubilee 25:8-55
- G. Promises and warnings ch. 26
  - 1. Introduction to the final conditions of the covenant 26:1-2
  - 2. The blessing for fidelity to the law 26:3-13
  - 3. The warning for contempt of the law 26:14-33
  - 4. The objective of God's judgments in relation to the land and nation of Israel 26:34-46
- H. Directions concerning vows ch. 27
  - 1. Vows concerning persons 27:1-8
  - 2. Vows concerning animals 27:9-13
  - 3. Vows concerning other property 27:14-29
  - 4. The redemption of tithes 27:30-34

## Exposition

### **I. THE PUBLIC WORSHIP OF THE ISRAELITES CHS. 1—16**

Leviticus continues revelation concerning the second of three elements necessary for any nation to exist, namely, a people (Gen. 12:10—Exod. 19), their law (Exod. 20—Num. 10:10), and their land (Num. 10:11—Josh. 24). The first major section of Leviticus deals with how the Israelites were to conduct their public life as an expression of worship to God.

"The fact that the covenant between Yahweh and Israel was modeled after those of the ancient Near East in both form and function allows one to understand the myriad of cultic detail in the Pentateuch with unusual clarity. The sacrifices and offerings were designed to demonstrate the subservience of Israel, to atone for her offenses against her Sovereign, Yahweh, and to reflect the harmoniousness and peaceableness of the relationship thus established or reestablished."<sup>16</sup>

"Put differently, the main concern of Leviticus 1—16 is the continuance of the presence of God in the midst of the sinful nation, while Leviticus 17—27 records the effect of the presence of God upon the congregation. Consequently the abiding presence of God in the midst of the nation spans the entire contents of the Book of Leviticus."<sup>17</sup>

#### **A. THE LAWS OF SACRIFICE CHS. 1—7**

God designed the offerings to teach the Israelites as well as to enable them to worship Him. They taught the people what was necessary to maintain and restore the believers' communion with God in view of their sin and defilement.

"The servant, therefore, had to approach his Sovereign at His dwelling place by presenting an appropriate token of his obedient submission."<sup>18</sup>

"Sacrifice is at the heart of all true worship. It serves as the consecrating ritual for participation in the holy rites, it forms the appropriate tribute due to the LORD, and it represents the proper spiritual attitude of the worshiper."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Merrill, p. 57. Cf. Wenham, pp. 25-26.

<sup>17</sup>Rooker, p. 42. Thus the movement in Leviticus is from doctrine (chs. 1—16) to practice (chs. 17—27), as in Romans 1—11 and 12—16 and in Ephesians 1—3 and 4—6. Similarly the content of Leviticus reflects that of the Ten Commandments, where the first four commandments deal with the believer's relationship to God and the last six his or her relationship to other people.

<sup>18</sup>Merrill, p. 57.

<sup>19</sup>Ross, p. 73.

The regulations that follow do not contain all the detail that we would need to duplicate these sacrifices. Only information that helps the reader understand and appreciate future references to the offerings appears. In this respect the present section of text is similar to the instructions concerning the tabernacle. Neither section gives us all the information we could want, but both tell us all that we need to know.

"They [chapters 1—7] may be compared to the genealogies in Genesis and those at the beginning of 1 Chronicles, whose purpose is to introduce the main characters of the subsequent narratives."<sup>20</sup>

Each offering involved three objects:

1. The offerer (the person bringing the offering)
2. The offering (the animal or other object being offered)
3. The mediator (the priest).

There were important differences between the offerings.<sup>21</sup>

1. Each offering was different from the other offerings.
2. Within each offering there were different options of what the offerer could present and how he could offer them.

The first three offerings were "soothing aroma" offerings. The last two also go together because they were not soothing aromas. The first three were offerings of worship that were a sweet aroma to God because they were made *in* communion and to *celebrate* communion with the Lord. Each of these offerings reveals what is essential for or what results from a relationship between a redeemed sinner and a holy God. The last two were offerings of expiation for sin and were therefore not a sweet savor to God. These two offerings reveal how to *restore* a broken relationship between a redeemed Israelite sinner and a holy God.

"This is *not* the order in which the sacrifices were usually offered, but is rather a logical or didactic order, grouping the sacrifices by conceptual associations . . . ." <sup>22</sup>

In the revelation of the first three offerings, each chapter contains three paragraphs. In each chapter God described the most valuable sacrifice first and then the less valuable. The rules about these sacrifices may have been arranged in logical order to make them easier to memorize.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Sailhamer, pp. 323-24.

<sup>21</sup>For charts of these differences in more detail, see *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, pp. 168-71.

<sup>22</sup>F. Duane Lindsey, "Leviticus," in *ibid.*, p. 172.

<sup>23</sup>A. F. Rainey, "The Order of Sacrifices in OT Ritual Texts," *Biblica* 51 (1970):487.



| <b>Burnt offerings (ch. 1)</b> | <b>Meal offerings (ch. 2)</b> | <b>Peace offerings (ch. 3)</b> |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| cattle (vv. 3-9)               | uncooked (vv. 1-3)            | cattle (vv. 1-5)               |
| sheep or goats (vv. 10-13)     | cooked (vv. 4-10)             | sheep (vv. 6-11)               |
| birds (vv. 14-17)              | miscellaneous (vv. 11-16)     | goats (vv. 12-17)              |

These laws concerning offerings appear here in the text because they explain the sacrifices and ceremonies that took place at the ordination of Aaron and his sons (chs. 8—9). This legal material prepares the reader to understand that narrative material. This arrangement is typical in Leviticus, as previously noted.

### **1. The burnt offering ch. 1**

The burnt offering (in Greek, *holokautoma*, from which we get the word "holocaust") expressed the offerer's complete consecration to Yahweh (cf. Matt. 22:37; Rom. 12:1-2) and God's complete acceptance of the worshiper. However it also made atonement for the offerer. Some rabbis believed the burnt offering atoned for all sins not covered under the sin offering.<sup>24</sup> Peace with God was the goal of all the sacrifices. The reasons for listing this offering first are that it was the most common and the most important one (in one sense), and because it belonged completely to God. The priests offered a burnt offering every morning and every evening, and more frequently on holy days.

"The first case is dealt with in the most detail. The two subsequent ones are explained more briefly. But in all three the law makes clear exactly what the worshiper does and what the priest does. The worshiper brings the animal, kills it, skins it or guts it, and chops it up. The priest sprinkles the blood on the altar and places the dismembered carcass on the fire."<sup>25</sup>

"The sense of God's presence, which permeates the entire book, is indicated forty-two times by the expression 'before the LORD [v. 3, *passim*].'"<sup>26</sup>

With this offering the worshiper was seeking to please the Lord and find acceptance into his presence. Leviticus thus begins with the good news of the way for redeemed sinners to find acceptance with God.

Note several *distinctives* of this offering.

1. It was a soothing aroma (or sweet savor; vv. 9, 13, 17). God was happy to receive this sacrifice because it was an offering of worship as well as payment for sin. It gave Him pleasure. The priests presented all three soothing aroma offerings on the brazen altar in the tabernacle courtyard. God saw the offerer as a worshiper as

<sup>24</sup>Rooker, p. 85.

<sup>25</sup>Wenham, p. 49.

<sup>26</sup>Schultz, p. 30.

well as a guilty sinner. The offering was to be without any blemish, which was also true of the sin and trespass offerings. This indicated that the offerer was presenting the best to God who is worthy of nothing less (vv. 3, 10).

2. It was for acceptance (i.e., so that God would accept the offerer, vv. 3-4). This offering satisfied God's desire for the love of His redeemed creatures as well as His offended justice. This offering satisfied God by its wholeness quantitatively and qualitatively. The Israelite worshiper offered a whole spotless animal in place of himself.
3. The offerer gave up a life on the altar (v. 5). God has always claimed life as His own. In slaying this animal the offerer was saying that he was giving the life that God had given him back to God, its rightful owner. Giving one's life to God is not an act of great sacrifice. It is simply giving back to God what already belongs to Him. It is only "reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1).
4. The animal perished completely, consumed in the fire on the altar (v. 9), except for the skin, which went to the priest (v. 6; 7:8). This symbolized the comprehensive nature of the offerer's consecration to God. Perhaps God excluded the skin to focus attention on the internal elements, the real person. God deserves the surrender of the entire person, not just a part.

"In the overfed West we can easily fail to realize what was involved in offering an unblemished animal in sacrifice. Meat was a rare luxury in OT times for all but the very rich (cf. Nathan's parable, 2 Sam. 12:1-6). Yet even we might blanch if we saw a whole lamb or bull go up in smoke as a burnt offering. How much greater pangs must a poor Israelite have felt."<sup>27</sup>

Note also some *variations* within this offering.

1. The animals acceptable for this offering varied. Bullocks (oxen), lambs, goats, turtledoves, and pigeons were acceptable. Some commentators suggest that each type of animal bore characteristics shared by man that made it an appropriate substitute (e.g., strong, foolish, flighty, etc.). Generally the higher the individual Israelite's responsibility before God (e.g., priests, rulers, common people, etc.) the larger and more expensive was the animal that he had to offer. People with greater responsibility would also have had more money and therefore more ability to bring the more expensive sacrifices.
2. The butchering of the animals also varied. The offerers cut the bullocks, lambs, and goats into four parts, but they did not do so with the birds. This difference at least reflects the practical need to divide larger animals into more easily manageable pieces. Moreover they washed the entrails and legs of the animals in water (vv. 9, 13). This washing probably symbolized the need for internal purity. They did not wash the birds. The offerer pressed (Heb. *samek*) his hand on the

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<sup>27</sup>Wenham, p. 51.

animals but not on the birds (cf. Isa. 59:16; Ezek. 24:2; 30:6; Amos 5:19).<sup>28</sup> The offerer personally slew the animals, but the priest slew the birds (vv. 5, 15).<sup>29</sup>

"The bird . . . offerings were, by and large, concessions to the poor (cf., e.g., Lev 5:7-10; 12:8; 14:21-32) and, therefore, not considered to be one of the primary categories of animal offerings."<sup>30</sup>

In summary, the burnt offering was an act of worship in which the Israelite offered to God a whole animal. The fire on the altar completely consumed it as a substitute for the offerer and as a symbol of his total personal consecration to God. These sacrifices were voluntary on the Israelite's part.

"The burnt offering was the commonest of all the OT sacrifices. Its main function was to atone for man's sin by propitiating God's wrath. In the immolation of the animal, most commonly a lamb, God's judgment against human sin was symbolized and the animal suffered in man's place. The worshiper acknowledged his guilt and responsibility for his sins by pressing his hand on the animal's head and confessing his sin. The lamb was accepted as the ransom price for the guilty man [cf. Mark 10:45; Eph. 2:5; Heb. 7:27; 1 Pet. 1:18-19]. The daily use of the sacrifice in the worship of the temple and tabernacle was a constant reminder of man's sinfulness and God's holiness. So were its occasional usages after sickness, childbirth, and vows. In bringing a sacrifice a man acknowledged his sinfulness and guilt. He also publicly confessed his faith in the Lord, his thankfulness for past blessing, and his resolve to live according to God's holy will all the days of his life."<sup>31</sup>

"It [the burnt offering] could serve as a votive or freewill offering (e.g., Lev 22:18-20), an accompaniment of prayer and supplication (e.g., 1 Sam 7:9-10), part of the regular daily, weekly, monthly, and festival cultic pattern (e.g., Num 28-29), or to make atonement either alone (e.g., Lev 1:4; 16:24) or in combination with the grain offering (e.g., Lev. 14:20) or sin offering (e.g., Lev 5:7; 9:7)."<sup>32</sup>

"The clearly stated purpose of the whole burnt offering was for atonement (l<sup>e</sup>kapper in 1:4). But the way that this offering made atonement or expiation was in a slightly different way than the purification [sin] and reparation [trespass] offerings. It was a more general offering than either of them; it did not emphasize the removal of sin or guilt or change the

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<sup>28</sup>See M. C. Sansom, "Laying on of Hands in the Old Testament," *The Expository Times* 94:11 (August 1983):323-26. Laying on hands often accompanied prayer (cf. 16:21; Deut. 21:6-9) suggesting that prayer accompanied sacrifice.

<sup>29</sup>In later periods, the priests slew all the animals.

<sup>30</sup>The NET Bible note on 1:2.

<sup>31</sup>Wenham, p. 63.

<sup>32</sup>The NET Bible note on 1:3.

worshiper's nature; but it made fellowship between sinful people and God possible . . ."<sup>33</sup>

Christians, too, need to remember our need for daily forgiveness, confess our sins, and purpose to walk in God's ways (cf. 1 John 1:7-9).

"The LORD accepts with pleasure whoever comes into his presence by substitutionary atonement through the shedding of blood."<sup>34</sup>

## **2. The meal offering ch. 2**

The meal (grain, cereal) offering was also an offering of worship that brought God pleasure. It evidently symbolized the sacrifice and commitment of one's person and works to God as well as the worshiper's willingness to keep the law (cf. Rom. 12:1-2; Heb. 13:15-16). A meal offering always followed the official daily burnt offering (cf. Num. 28), and it often accompanied a peace offering (cf. Num. 15:3-5; 2 Kings 16:33). The meal offering was a type of tribute from a faithful worshiper to his divine overlord.<sup>35</sup>

"God having granted forgiveness of sins through the burnt offering, the worshiper responded by giving to God some of the produce of his hands in cereal offering."<sup>36</sup>

"The 'grain offering' . . . generally accompanied a burnt or peace offering to supplement the meat with bread (the libation provided the drink; cf. Num 15:1-10), thus completing the food 'gift' to the LORD. It made atonement . . . along with the burnt offering (e.g., Lev 14:20) or alone as a sin offering for the poor (Lev 5:11-13)."<sup>37</sup>

This offering was *distinctive* from the others in the following respects.

1. It was a soothing aroma (vv. 2, 9). To God the meal offering was pleasing because it was an act of worship based on atonement for sin.
2. The offering itself was the fruit of human labor. A possible contrast between the burnt and meal offerings is that one represented what man owes God and the other what he owes his fellowman.<sup>38</sup> However it seems more likely that the contrast intended was primarily between the person of the offerer and his works. The animals offered in the burnt offering were God's creations, but the cake or grain offered in the meal offering was the product of man's labor. God charged mankind with the responsibility of cultivating the earth (Gen. 1:29; cf. 9:4-6). Man

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<sup>33</sup>Ross, pp. 92-93.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>35</sup>The Hebrew word *minhah*, here translated "meal offering," also means "tribute."

<sup>36</sup>Wenham, p. 71.

<sup>37</sup>The NET Bible note on 2:1.

<sup>38</sup>Andrew Jukes, *The Law of the Offerings*, pp. 77-78.

cultivates the ground to provide for the needs of man—his own needs and the needs of other people. The grain or flour from which the "staff of life" comes symbolized what God enabled man to produce. By offering this sacrifice the offerer was saying that he viewed all the work that he did as an offering to the Lord.

The meal offering appears to have been acceptable only when offered with the burnt offering. This indicated that one's works were acceptable to God only when they accompanied the offerer's consecration of himself to God.

The materials used in this offering undoubtedly had significance to the Israelites. Fine flour (v. 1) baked into bread represented then, as now, the staff of life. The fact that the offerer had ground the flour fine probably emphasized the human toil represented by the offering. The olive oil (v. 1), as mentioned previously, was a symbol of God's enabling Spirit that bound the flour of the offering into cake. This consistency made it possible to offer the sacrifice as a finished "dish" rather than as a collection of ingredients. Frankincense (v. 1) was a very fragrant spice, but its aroma did not become evident until someone subjected it to fire. The oil and incense made the offering richer and more desirable, and therefore more pleasing to God. God also specified salt for this offering (v. 13). Salt symbolized a covenant in that nothing in antiquity could destroy salt including fire and time. Adding salt to an offering reminded the worshiper that he was in an eternal covenant relationship with his God. God specifically excluded honey and leaven from the recipe for the meal offering (v. 11). Some writers have suggested that these ingredients represented natural sweetness and sin to the Israelites.<sup>39</sup> Most have felt they were unacceptable because they cause fermentation, and fermentation suggested corruption.<sup>40</sup>

3. Another distinction was that the priest did not offer the whole meal offering on the altar. He placed only a handful of the uncooked grain or cooked cake on the brazen altar and burned it. The priest ate the rest (vv. 9-10). The offerer cooked the dough at home first, of course, and offered it as cake rather than batter (vv. 4, 5, 7). Humankind, symbolized by the priest, derived most of the benefit of this offering. This was appropriate since it represented man's work for his fellowman. The offerer received none of this sacrifice for himself. This too was appropriate.

"The idea of a memorial portion given to God goes beyond a simple reminding. The verb often carries the nuance of beginning to act on the basis of what is remembered. The 'memorial portion' thus reminded or prompted worshipers to live according to the covenant obligations, that is, to live as if all they had truly came from the LORD; and it prompted or motivated the LORD to honor and bless those who offered this dedication."<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., pp. 88, 90.

<sup>40</sup>E.g., Keil and Delitzsch, 2:295; J. H. Hertz, *Leviticus*, p. 16.

<sup>41</sup>Ross, p. 107.

4. Finally, the sacrifice was "to the Lord" (v. 1). Though it fed the priests the offerer did not offer it for the priests but to God (cf. Eph. 6:7; Col. 3:23-24).

God permitted various kinds of meal offerings: baked (v. 4), grilled (v. 5), fried, (v. 7), and roasted (v. 14). These constituted the *variations* within this offering. If this offering was public, it usually took the form of firstfruits, but if it was private, an Israelite could bring it to the tabernacle whenever he desired to do so.

"The LORD expects his people to offer themselves and the best they have as a token of their dedication and gratitude."<sup>42</sup>

### **3. The peace offering ch. 3**

The peace (fellowship, NIV) offering is the third sacrifice of worship. It represented the fellowship between God and man that resulted from the relationship that God had established with the redeemed individual. Peace and fellowship resulted from redemption, and this act of worship highlighted those blessings from God. This was an optional sacrifice; an Israelite could bring it if and when he felt like it. Thus it was not one of the offerings that the priests presented daily in the tabernacle, though God ordered its presentation at the feast of Pentecost (a.k.a. Harvest, Weeks; 23:19). Because it was voluntary, its offering became a festive occasion.

There were two major *distinctives* of this offering.

1. It was a soothing aroma (v. 16).
2. All the participants fed together on this sacrifice: the offerer, the priest, and God (symbolically). Eating together had great significance in the ancient Near East. People who ate a ritual meal together were committing themselves to one another in a strong bond of loyalty. Eating together also symbolized fellowship. In this sacrifice the offerer fed on the same offering he had made to God. In the burnt offering God got the whole sacrifice. In the meal offering God and the priest shared the sacrifice. However in the peace offering all three participants shared a part. Even the priest's children ate of this offering, but they had to be ceremonially clean to participate (7:20; cf. 1 Cor. 11:28).

"A libation [drink] offering (*nesek*) accompanied burnt and fellowship offerings. The priest's portion of the fellowship offering was symbolically 'waved' before the Lord as his portion and called the 'wave offering' (*tenupa*). Certain portions of it (namely, one of the cakes and the right thigh) were given as a 'contribution' from the offerer to the priests, the so-called 'heave offering' (*teruma*)."<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 108.

<sup>43</sup>Bruce K. Waltke, "Cain and His Offering," *Westminster Theological Journal* 48:2 (Fall 1986):366.

The Israelites were not to eat the fat of this sacrifice but to offer it to God on the altar. This may have symbolized that God was worthy of the best since the ancients regarded the fat of an animal as its best part. Another explanation is that since the Old Testament used the kidneys and entrails to represent the seat of human emotions (cf. Job 19:27; Ps. 16:7; Jer. 4:14; 12:2), these parts represented the worshiper's best and deepest emotions. This view finds support in the fact that Israelites offered the peace offering in intrinsically emotional situations, when they thanked God or requested from Him.<sup>44</sup>

"The slain-offering [peace offering], which culminated in the sacrificial meal, served as a seal of the covenant fellowship, and represented the living fellowship of man with God."<sup>45</sup>

These *varieties* are significant.

1. There were several grades of animals that God permitted. These were similar to the burnt offering but were fewer. Bulls, lambs, and goats were acceptable. Female animals were acceptable showing that there were more options than with the burnt offering.
2. The Israelites could present this offering for any of three possible reasons: as a thanksgiving offering, as a freewill offering, or to fulfill a vow (i.e., a votive offering; cf. 7:12-16).

When the Israelites offered thousands of sacrifices at one time they were usually peace offerings. They ate only a part of what they offered on these occasions.<sup>46</sup> There are many similarities between this offering and the Lord's Supper. Both were celebrations that commemorated a covenant, both were occasions of rededication to God, and both involved blood.

"Those who surrender their hearts to God and come before him on the basis of the shed blood of the sacrifice may celebrate being at peace with God (in a communal meal)."<sup>47</sup>

#### **4. The sin offering 4:1—5:13**

Keil and Delitzsch pointed out that ancient Near Easterners offered certain offerings before God incorporated these into the Mosaic Law. Moses previously mentioned burnt offerings in Genesis 12:7; 13:4, 18; 22; 26:25; 33:20; and 35:1-7, and peace offerings in Genesis 31:54 and 46:1. However the sin and trespass offerings were new.

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<sup>44</sup>See Wenham, pp. 80-81.

<sup>45</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, 2:268.

<sup>46</sup>R. Laird Harris, "Leviticus," in *Genesis-Numbers*, vol. 2 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 538.

<sup>47</sup>Ross, p. 119.

They ". . . were altogether unknown before the economy of the Sinaitic law."<sup>48</sup>

The structure of the chapters dealing with the sin and trespass offerings differs from that describing the burnt, meal, and peace offerings. Also the opening words of this chapter introduce a new section. These differences help us appreciate the fact that these two offerings were in a class by themselves while sharing some of the similarities of the first three. The sacrificial victim was the organizing principle in chapters 1—3 with revelation about the more valuable animals leading off each chapter. In 4:1—6:7 the most important factor is the type of sin that called for sacrifice, and the status of the sinner is a secondary factor.

"Whereas the main issue in the burnt, grain, and fellowship offerings was the proper procedure to be followed, the main issue in the discussion in the sin and guilt offerings is the occasion that would require these sacrifices."<sup>49</sup>

There were two types of occasions that called for the sin offering: unwitting or inadvertent sins (ch. 4) and sins of omission (5:1-13). We could subdivide this section on the sin offering as follows.<sup>50</sup>

#### Inadvertent sin ch. 4

Introduction 4:1-2

Blood sprinkled in the holy place 4:3-21

For the high priest 4:3-12

For the congregation 4:13-21

Blood smeared on the brazen altar 4:22-35

For the tribal leader 4:22-26

For the ordinary Israelite offering a goat 4:27-31

For the ordinary Israelite offering a lamb 4:32-35

#### Sins of omission 5:1-13

A lamb or goat offering 5:1-6

A bird offering 5:7-10

A flour offering 5:11-13

The sin (purification, Heb. *hatta't*) offering dealt with unintentional sins. The translation "sin offering" is a bit misleading since the burnt, peace, and trespass offerings also atoned for sin.

"Propitiation of divine anger . . . is an important element in the burnt offering. Restitution . . . is the key idea in the reparation [trespass] offering. Purification is the main element in the purification [sin] sacrifice. Sin not only angers God and deprives him of his due, it also makes his

<sup>48</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, 2:269.

<sup>49</sup>Rooker, p. 106.

<sup>50</sup>Wenham, p. 87.



sanctuary unclean. A holy God cannot dwell amid uncleanness. The purification offering purifies the place of worship, so that God may be present among his people."<sup>51</sup>

"The root *ht*' for 'sin' occurs 595 times in the Old Testament, and Leviticus, with 116 attestations, has far more occurrences than any other Old Testament book. This section (fifty-three attestations) is the heaviest concentration of the discussion of 'sin' in the Bible."<sup>52</sup>

Like the burnt and meal offerings this one was compulsory, but the Israelites offered it less frequently (cf. Num. 28—29). The most important feature of this offering was the sprinkling of the blood of the sacrifice.

"The law reminds people of sin—not just the major sins, but sins that are often overlooked, like not keeping one's word, failing to do what is right, or living in a defiled world and never considering what that does to the spiritual life."<sup>53</sup>

Three notable *distinctives* stand out.

1. This offering was not a soothing aroma. It was for expiation, namely, to make amends. The offerer ritually charged the sacrificial animal with his sin (cf. Isa. 53:5; 1 Pet. 2:24). The animal had to be without defect (cf. 1 Pet. 2:22). The offerer executed God's judgment for sin on the sacrificial substitute when he slew it. In every sin offering an innocent substitute replaced the sinner (cf. 2 Cor. 5:21).

A problem arises in verse 31 where Moses referred to this non-soothing offering as a soothing aroma. One commentator suggested that a copyist accidentally transferred the statement from the discussions of the peace offering in chapter 3.<sup>54</sup> Another believed it was the burning of the fatty tissue, not the whole sin offering, that was the soothing aroma.<sup>55</sup>

2. Smearing blood on the horns of the altar symbolized purifying the whole sanctuary. The horns represented the powerful force of the entire altar. The priest burned outside the camp the skin and other parts that he did not eat or burn on the altar. He burned the fat on the altar. God evidently regarded it as the best part of the animal. The priest ate most of the flesh (6:26; cf. Heb. 13:11-13; Matt. 27:46).
3. This offering dealt with most unintentionally committed sins (cf. 5:14-16). These oversights demonstrated a sinful nature. Any sin committed unwittingly (4:2, 13, 22, 27; 5:2-4) proved the need for this offering and demonstrated a sinful nature.

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>52</sup>Rooker, p. 107.

<sup>53</sup>Ross, p. 144.

<sup>54</sup>A. Noordtzi, *Leviticus*, p. 63.

<sup>55</sup>Harrison, p. 67.

God permitted several *varieties* of this offering.

1. God permitted the offering of less expensive animals or flour (5:11) by the poor. However everyone had to offer this sacrifice since everyone committed unintentional sins. Flour did not express the cost of expiation as well as a blood sacrifice did, but God permitted it for the very poor.

"On the one hand this arrangement says that the more influential the person, the costlier the offering that had to be brought—the sins of the prominent were more defiling. But on the other hand it is also saying that the way was open to all. The poor were not excluded because their sins were not so defiling or because they had no animals. God made provision for everyone to find cleansing for reentry into the sanctuary."<sup>56</sup>

2. People with higher social and economic status had to bring more expensive sacrifices illustrating the principle that privilege increases responsibility. Evidently any sin that the high priest committed in private or in his public capacity brought guilt on the whole nation (cf. 10:6; 22:16).<sup>57</sup>
3. God allowed procedural differences as well (e.g., where the priest sprinkled the blood, how he burned the fat, etc.) depending on the offerer's position in the nation.

The sin offering covered only sins committed unintentionally. This category included sins done by mistake, in error, through oversight or ignorance, through lack of consideration, or by carelessness. That is, this sacrifice covered sins that sprang from the weakness of the flesh (cf. Num. 15:27-29). It did not cover sins committed with a "high hand," namely, in haughty, defiant rebellion against God. Such a sinner was "cut off from among his people" (Num. 15:30-31). Many reliable commentators interpret this phrase to mean the offender suffered death.<sup>58</sup> Not all deliberate sins were "high handed," however, only those committed in defiant rebellion against God.

"The sin offerings did not relate to sin or sinfulness in general, but to particular manifestations of sin, to certain distinct actions performed by individuals, or by the whole congregation."<sup>59</sup>

Note the promises that the offering would atone for these sins (4:26, 31, 35; 5:10).

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<sup>56</sup>Ross, p. 131.

<sup>57</sup>Wenham, p. 97.

<sup>58</sup>E.g., Keil and Delitzsch, 1:224; Wenham, pp. 241-2; idem, *Numbers*, p. 131.

<sup>59</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, 2:302-303. The meaning of "congregation" is somewhat obscure. Sometimes the whole nation seems to be in view (e.g., Exod. 12:3, 6; 17:1; Num. 20:1-2). If this is the meaning in verses 13-21, as seems to be the case, the "congregation" is synonymous with the "assembly." However in other passages "congregation" seems to describe a representative group within the nation (e.g., Exod. 16:1-2, 9; Num. 8:20; 15:33-36; 27:2; 35:12, 24-25). The context helps determine the meaning.

Scholars have understood the meaning of "atonement," from the Hebrew root *kpr*, in three different ways. Most of them have believed that it is related to the Arabic cognate meaning "to cover." Another possibility is that the verb means "to wipe or purge." A third view is that the verb means "to ransom." Probably the second and third views are best since they go back to the Hebrew root rather than to the Arabic cognate. Both these interpretations are valid depending on the context. However, the idea of covering is also frequently present.<sup>60</sup>

"... one hears it being taught that sins in the Old Testament were never fully forgiven or atoned, but merely covered over as a temporary measure. But Scripture says that atonement was made and they were forgiven (Lev. 4:26, 31, 35; Ps. 130:4; 32:1-2 ... )."<sup>61</sup>

Most commentators understand this sacrifice as the principal expiatory offering in ancient Israel.<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless references to this offering in the text consistently connect it with purification. Sin defiles people and, particularly, God's sanctuary. Animal blood was the means of purification. The pollution of sin does not endanger God but human beings. Textual evidence points to the burnt offering as the principal atoning sacrifice in Israel.<sup>63</sup>

The idea that sin pollutes and defiles seems very strange in the modern world. Notwithstanding Leviticus reveals that sins pollute the place where they take place (cf. 18:24-30; Deut. 21:1-9).

The relationship of 5:1-13 to chapter 4 is a problem. I have suggested one solution above: these sin offerings deal with sins of omission rather than inadvertent sin. One scholar suggested another explanation.

"Modern critics tend to regard 5:1-13 as the 'poor man's' offering, the option given to the offender of 4:27-35 who cannot afford the prescribed flock animal. This interpretation, however, is beset with stylistic and contextual difficulties: ... My own hypothesis is herewith submitted: The graduated *hatta't* [sin offering] is a distinct sacrificial category. It is enjoined for failure or inability to cleanse impurity upon its occurrence. This 'the sin of which he is guilty' (5:6, 10, 13) is not the contraction of impurity but its *prolongation*."<sup>64</sup>

This relationship continues to be the subject of some debate. Wenham summarized this section well.

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<sup>60</sup>See Rooker, p. 52, for further discussion.

<sup>61</sup>Ross, p. 93.

<sup>62</sup>E.g., Hertz, p. 22; C. F. Keil, *Manual of Biblical Archaeology*, 1:299.

<sup>63</sup>See Wenham, *The Book ...*, pp. 93-95.

<sup>64</sup>Jacob Milgrom, "The Graduated *Hatta't* of Leviticus 5:1-13," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 103:1 (January-March 1983):249-250.

"The purification [sin] offering dealt with the pollution caused by sin. If sin polluted the land, it defiled particularly the house where God dwelt. The seriousness of pollution depended on the seriousness of the sin, which in turn related to the status of the sinner. If a private citizen sinned, his action polluted the sanctuary only to a limited extent. Therefore the blood of the purification offering was only smeared on the horns of the altar of burnt sacrifice. If, however, the whole nation sinned or the holiest member of the nation, the high priest, sinned, this was more serious. The blood had to be taken inside the tabernacle and sprinkled on the veil and the altar of incense. Finally over the period of a year the sins of the nation could accumulate to such an extent that they polluted even the holy of holies, where God dwelt. If he was to continue to dwell among his people, this too had to be cleansed in the annual day of atonement ceremony (see Lev. 16)."<sup>65</sup>

Under the New Covenant the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses the believer from all sin (cf. Heb. 9—10; 1 Pet. 1:2; 1 John 1:7; Rev. 7:14). Thus this offering is now obsolete for the Christian. However sin in the believer's life can grieve the indwelling Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:30). Furthermore the New Testament reminds us that judgment is still proportionate to responsibility (cf. Luke 12:48; James 3:1). For us confession is a prerequisite to cleansing for fellowship (1 John 1:9) even though Christ's death has brought purification from sin's defilement.

"God will restore the sinner who appeals to him for forgiveness on the basis of the purifying blood of the sacrifice."<sup>66</sup>

"Anyone who becomes aware of obligations left undone or impure contacts left unpurified must make confession and find forgiveness through God's provision of atonement."<sup>67</sup>

### **5. The trespass offering 5:14—6:7**

The structure of 4:1—6:7 indicates that this offering has a close relationship to the sin offering. This offering removed the guilt of certain sins that involved trespassing against God. Trespassing means going beyond the limits of what is right. The Hebrew word *'asham*, translated "guilt," also means "reparation." It may be helpful to think of this offering as a reparation or compensation offering since other sacrifices also deal with guilt.

"Guilt in the biblical sense is not just a feeling but a condition. There may be known transgressions that bring feelings of guilt, but there is also the condition of guilt before God, caused by sins known or unknown.

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<sup>65</sup>Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 96.

<sup>66</sup>Ross, p. 134.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., p. 144.

Sometimes a hardened sinner has few feelings of guilt when he is the most guilty."<sup>68</sup>

This chapter is divisible into two parts: the trespass offering for inadvertent sin (5:14-19), and the trespass offering for deliberate sin (6:1-7). There is a further distinction in 5:14-19 between trespasses that someone committed with sure knowledge of his guilt (5:14-16) and those that someone committed with only suspected knowledge of his guilt (5:17-19).

"From all these cases it is perfectly evident, that the idea of satisfaction for a right, which had been violated but was about to be restored or recovered, lay at the foundation of the trespass offering, and the ritual also points to this."<sup>69</sup>

The identity of the "holy things" (v. 15) is problematic. The phrase evidently refers to anything dedicated to God by the Israelites including the tabernacle, its furnishings, the offerings, houses, lands, and tithes (cf. ch. 27).<sup>70</sup> Violating these things would have involved eating holy food (cf. 22:14), taking dedicated things, and perhaps failing to fulfill a dedicatory vow or pay a tithe.

The situation described in verses 17-19 evidently involved an instance of suspected trespass against sacred property. Someone suspected that he had sinned but did not know exactly how.<sup>71</sup> This sacrifice pacified oversensitive Israelite consciences. Stealing sacred property was one of the most dreaded sins in antiquity.<sup>72</sup>

The third type of offense (6:1-7) involved not only stealing property but lying about it when confronted. The real offense was not so much taking the property as trespassing against God's holy name by swearing falsely about one's innocence.

"It seems likely that atonement for deliberate sins was possible where there was evidence of true repentance, demonstrated by remorse (feeling guilty), full restitution (v. 23 [4]), and confession of sin (cf. Num. 5:6-8)."<sup>73</sup>

The major *distinctives* of this offering were these.

1. It was not a soothing aroma offering.
2. The Israelites were to offer it when they had wronged someone—either God (5:15, 17) or God and man (6:2). Every trespass against one's neighbor involved a

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<sup>68</sup>Harris, p. 551.

<sup>69</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, 2:316.

<sup>70</sup>Jacob Milgrom, "The Compass of Biblical Sancta," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 65 (April 1975):216.

<sup>71</sup>Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 108.

<sup>72</sup>Jacob Milgrom, *Cult and Conscience: The "Asham" and the Priestly Doctrine of Repentance*, pp. 76-77.

<sup>73</sup>Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 109.

trespass against God, but not every trespass against God involved a trespass against one's neighbor (cf. Ps. 51:1-4). Even though the offender may not have been aware of his trespass, he was still guilty. When he became aware of his sin or even suspected his guilt, he had to bring this offering. This repentance reduced the guilt of the crime to that of an involuntary act.<sup>74</sup>

3. The offending Israelite had to pay restitution to the injured party in some cases (5:16; 6:5). The guilty party had to restore whatever the victim of his sin had lost.
4. In addition to restitution the offender had to add 20 percent (5:16; 6:5). This policy applied in the ancient Near East outside Israel in some cases (cf. Gen. 47:27). God considered the fifth part a debt the offender owed because of his offense, not a gift to the victim. The victim ended up better off in one sense than he was before the offense. Reparation is evidence of true repentance (cf. Matt. 3:8; 5:23-24; Luke 19:8-9).

There is much less description of the ritual involved in presenting this offering compared to the others (cf. 7:1-7).

The only significant *variations* in this offering were that only a ram or a male lamb were acceptable sacrifices (cf. 5:14-19; 14:12-20; 19:21-22; Num. 6:12). Evidently if a person could not bring a ram or a lamb he could substitute the value of the animal in silver.<sup>75</sup> There were more options in most of the other sacrifices.

"The reparation offering thus demonstrates that there is another aspect of sin that is not covered by the other sacrifices. It is that of satisfaction or compensation. If the burnt offering brings reconciliation between God and man, the purification or sin offering brings purification, while the reparation offering brings satisfaction through paying for the sin.

"The sacrificial system therefore presents different models or analogies to describe the effects of sin and the way of remedying them. The burnt offering uses a personal picture: of man the guilty sinner who deserves to die for his sin and of the animal dying in his place. God accepts the animal as a ransom for man. The sin offering uses a medical model: sin makes the world so dirty that God can no longer dwell there. The blood of the animal disinfects the sanctuary in order that God may continue to be present with his people. The reparation offering presents a commercial picture of sin. Sin is a debt which man incurs against God. The debt is paid through the offered animal."<sup>76</sup>

<sup>74</sup>See Jacob Milgrom, "The Priestly Doctrine of Repentance," *Revue Biblique* 82 (April 1975):186-205.

<sup>75</sup>E. A. Speiser, *Oriental and Biblical Studies*, pp. 124-28; B. A. Levine, *In the Presence of the Lord*, pp. 124-28.

<sup>76</sup>Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 111.

Christians do not need to try to compensate God for our offenses against Him since He has accepted the sacrifice of Jesus Christ as full payment for our debts (cf. 2 Cor. 5:19; Eph. 2:1; Col. 2:13). Nevertheless we have a responsibility to recompense others against whom we trespass (cf. Matt. 5:23-24; 6:12).

"Anyone who violates the covenant by defrauding the LORD of another person must confess the sin and make full restitution in order to find full forgiveness and restoration."<sup>77</sup>

### **6. Instructions for the priests concerning the offerings 6:8—7:38**

"The five basic sacrifices are . . . introduced twice, each sacrifice being treated both in the main section addressed to the people [1:1—6:7] and in the supplementary section addressed to the priests [6:8—7:38]."<sup>78</sup>

The main theme of this section is who may eat what parts of the offerings and where. Generally only the priests could eat the sacrifices, but the offerers could eat part of the peace offering. In this section frequency of offering determines the order of the material. The regular daily burnt and meal sacrifices come first, then the less frequent sin (purification) offering, then the occasional trespass (reparation) offering, and finally the optional peace (fellowship) offering.

"To lead the congregation in corporate worship is both a great privilege and an enormous responsibility. In the following passages something of the responsibility concerning the ritual is laid out for the priests."<sup>79</sup>

"To bring a person closer to God is the highest service that one person can render another."<sup>80</sup>

### **The law of the burnt offering 6:8-13**

Each morning a priest would put on his robes, approach the altar of burnt offerings, and clean out the ashes. Correct clothing was essential so that it would cover his "flesh" (i.e., his private parts, v. 10; cf. Exod. 20:26; 28:42-43).<sup>81</sup> He would then change his clothes and put on ordinary garments, collect the ashes, and take them outside the camp to a clean place where he would leave them. He could not wear his official robes outside the courtyard, but he had to wear them whenever he approached the brazen altar. Obviously Moses did not record in Leviticus all the details involved in sacrificing.

The main point in this legislation was that the fire on the altar of burnt offerings was never to go out when the Israelites were encamped (vv. 9, 12, 13). This was fire that God

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<sup>77</sup>Ross, p. 152.

<sup>78</sup>Lindsey, p. 172.

<sup>79</sup>Ross, p. 155.

<sup>80</sup>J. S. Stewart, quoted by D. Tidball, *Discovering Leviticus*, p. 49.

<sup>81</sup>Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 119.

Himself had kindled (9:24). Since the fire represented God's presence, this perpetual burning reminded the Israelites that the way of access to God by the burnt offering sacrifice was always ready and available. It also reminded them of the importance of maintaining close contact with God and of the continuing need for atonement to cover their ever-recurring sins. The New Testament teaches Christians to maintain the same awareness (1 Thess. 5:19; Heb. 7:25).

"Although atonement for sin was provided in each of the blood offerings, atonement was not their basic purpose. Israel's initial relationship with God as His redeemed people had been established through the Passover sacrifice on the night of their deliverance from Egypt. The offerings presented at the Tabernacle were the means of maintaining that relationship between the Israelites and their God."<sup>82</sup>

"Those who minister must take care in personal sanctification and spiritual service to ensure that people may always find access to the holy God."<sup>83</sup>

### **The law of the meal offering 6:14-18**

God considered the meal, sin, and trespass offerings "most holy" (6:17, 25; 7:1, 6). This means that they were sacrifices that only the priests could eat.

The "layman who touched these most holy things became holy through the contact, so that henceforth he had to guard against defilement in the same manner as the sanctified priests (21:1-8), though without sharing the priestly rights and prerogatives. This necessarily placed him in a position which would involve many inconveniences in connection with ordinary life."<sup>84</sup>

These instructions about the meal offering underline the priests' rights. They could eat this offering but only in a holy place, such as the tabernacle courtyard. The priests enjoyed special privileges, but they also had to observe high standards of behavior. This is also true of Christians (cf. Luke 12:48; James 3:1; 1 Pet. 4:17).

### **The meal (cereal) offering of the priests 6:19-23**

The priest was to offer a daily meal offering every morning and evening for himself and the other priests. This was just one small offering half of which he offered with the morning burnt offering and half with the evening burnt offering. Unlike other meal offerings he burned it up completely on the altar; he was not to eat a sacrifice that he offered for himself. This sacrifice represented the constant worship of the priests as they served God day by day. This taught the Israelites that the priests were not just to serve God by serving His people, but they were also to worship Him themselves. It is easy to

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<sup>82</sup>Schultz, p. 67.

<sup>83</sup>Ross, p. 161.

<sup>84</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, 2:319.



become so involved in serving and ministering to others that we stop worshipping God ourselves.

"Ministers must assure worshipers that God accepts sincere dedication—not only by how they receive the acts of dedication but also by how they themselves live dedicated lives."<sup>85</sup>

### **The law of the sin (purification) offering 6:24-30**

The priests slew the burnt, sin, and trespass offerings in the same place, before the altar of burnt offerings. Again the emphasis is on what the priests could and could not eat. They were not to confuse the holy and the common (profane; cf. v. 18).

"People need to know that they have been forgiven and that they can enter God's presence with confidence; they need the reality of forgiveness, not simply the hope of forgiveness. If worshipers come away from a worship service unsure of their standing with God, then something has gone terribly wrong."<sup>86</sup>

### **The law of the trespass (reparation) offering 7:1-10**

Here we have more detail concerning the ritual involved in this offering than we read formerly (ch. 5). The procedures for slaughtering the trespass offering and sprinkling its blood were the same as for the burnt offering (1:5). The priests burned only the fatty parts on the altar (cf. 3:9; 4:8). They were to eat the flesh of this offering (cf. 6:22).

"Ministers must assure repentant worshipers of their restitution when they seek forgiveness based on the atoning blood and show repentance by their desire to make things right."<sup>87</sup>

### **The law of the peace (fellowship) offering 7:11-36**

This is the only offering that ordinary Israelites could eat, but the priests also ate a part. This pericope clarifies who could eat what and when. For many Israelites eating the peace offering was probably the main, and perhaps the only, time they ate meat. Consequently this pericope also contains general regulations governing the consumption of meat (vv. 22-27).

"The thanksgiving . . . gift [v. 12] represented the donor's acknowledgement of God's mercies to him, while the votive . . . [v. 16] comprised an offering in fulfillment of a vow. The freewill . . . offering [v. 16] consisted of an act of homage and obedience to the Lord where no vow had been made, and with the other categories of well-being sacrifices

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<sup>85</sup>Ross, p. 165.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., p. 167.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., p. 177.

lent substance to the conviction in Israel that God valued a tangible response to His blessings more than a mere verbal profession of gratitude, which might or might not be sincere."<sup>88</sup>

One writer summarized the lessons of 7:11-21 as follows.

- "I. Believers are to celebrate their peace with God (11).
- II. Those at peace with God should express material and public gratitude for divine assistance (12-15).
  - A. Gratitude demands a generous material response (12-13).
  - B. Gratitude must be directed to God (14).
  - C. Gratitude needs to be expressed in a group (15).
- III. Those at peace with God may obligate themselves to undertake acts of tribute to God (16a).
- IV. Those at peace with God want to perform free acts of homage in appreciation to God (16b-18).
- V. Maintaining peace with God is to be taken very seriously (19-21)."<sup>89</sup>

"Celebration of being at peace with God requires the generosity and purity of those who share the common meal."<sup>90</sup>

The seriousness of eating while unclean is clear from the penalty imposed (vv. 20-21), which was direct divine judgment, usually death.<sup>91</sup> God also prescribed this penalty for anyone who ate the fat (God's portion, v. 25) or meat from which the blood had not been drained (v. 27; 1 Sam. 14:33). The "fat" apparently refers to the best portions of the healthiest animals, not just to what we consider the actual fat (cf. Gen. 4:4).<sup>92</sup> Blood represented life that was the medium of atonement for humankind and as such is inappropriate for human consumption (cf. 17:10-14; Gen. 9:4; Acts 15:29). God claimed the lives and best of His people.

There may have been a hygienic reason for God prohibiting the eating of animal fat too.

"Animal fats eaten consistently in significant amounts over a lengthy period of time can raise the cholesterol level already present in the blood and, especially in conjunction with hypertension, can result in such conditions as arteriosclerosis and atherosclerosis, both of which cause circulatory accidents. Had the eating of animal fat and suet been

<sup>88</sup>Harrison, p. 79.

<sup>89</sup>Brian Rosner, "The Ritual of the Peace Offering: Leviticus 7:11-21," *Exegesis and Exposition* 2:1 (Summer 1987):85-90.

<sup>90</sup>Ross, p. 184.

<sup>91</sup>Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 125. See my note on Gen. 17:4. Some scholars, such as Harris, p. 558, hold that the phrase "cut off from his people" sometimes refers to death and other times refers to excommunication. The problem with this view is that making the choice becomes a matter of the interpreter's preference since the one phrase describes many different situations.

<sup>92</sup>Ross, p. 186.

permitted, such an imbalance of cholesterol might well have been precipitated among the Hebrews, since they were already ingesting such saturated fats as butter (*i.e.* curds) and cheese. But by restricting the intake of potentially damaging fats, the circulatory system would be enabled to maintain a reasonable blood-cholesterol level, and allow the factor known as high-density lipoprotein to protect the arteries and the heart against disease. Some modern cancer researchers also maintain that a diet high in saturated fats can lead to mammary gland and colon cancer in those who are constitutionally (*i.e.* genetically) predisposed."<sup>93</sup>

Jesus Christ terminated the Mosaic Law including its dietary restrictions by declaring all foods clean (Mark 7:19). He meant that from then on diet would have nothing to do with one's relationship with God, as it did under the Law. He did not mean that the potentially harmful results of eating certain foods would cease. Our relationship with God is unaffected by the foods we choose to eat as Christians. However, God's dietary guidelines for the Israelites help us identify foods that it may be wise for us to avoid for physical reasons. Some of the dietary restrictions of the Mosaic Law expressed God's concern for His people's physical welfare as well as for their spiritual welfare.

The wave offering (vv. 30-34) describes one way in which the priest and the offerer presented the offerings of consecration.

". . . the priest laid the object to be waved upon the hands of the offerer, and then placed his own hands underneath, and moved the hands of the offerer backwards and forwards in a horizontal direction, to indicate by the movement forwards, *i.e.*, in the direction towards the altar, the presentation of the sacrifice, or the symbolical transference of it to God, and by the movement backwards, the reception of it back again, as a present which God handed over to His servants the priests."<sup>94</sup>

"According to traditional Jewish exegesis 'contribution' (or heaving) was effected by a vertical, up-and-down action, whereas 'dedication' (waving) was done with a sideways action."<sup>95</sup>

"In our obligations to give our best to God, we must recognize that a portion of our giving belongs to those who minister."<sup>96</sup>

### Summary of the law of the offerings 7:37-38

This section closes with a summary. This is a common feature of Leviticus (cf. 11:46-47; 13:59; 14:54-57; 15:32-33).

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<sup>93</sup>Harrison, p. 58.

<sup>94</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, 2:328.

<sup>95</sup>Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 126.

<sup>96</sup>Ross, p. 193.

"The sacrificial law, therefore, with the five species of sacrifices which it enjoins, embraces every aspect in which Israel was to manifest its true relation to the Lord its God. Whilst the sanctification of the whole man in self-surrender to the Lord was shadowed forth in the burnt-offerings, the fruits of the sanctification in the meat-offerings, and the blessedness of the possession and enjoyment of saving grace in the peace-offerings, the expiatory sacrifices furnished the means of removing the barrier which sins and trespasses had set up between the sinner and the holy God, and procured the forgiveness of sin and guilt, so that the sinner could attain once more to the unrestricted enjoyment of the covenant grace."<sup>97</sup>

"Jesus said that God must be worshipped in spirit and in truth. And it has become commonplace to contrast spirit and form as if they were incompatible in worship. 'The letter killeth but the Spirit giveth life' is a text that out of context (2 Cor. 3:6) can be used to justify slapdash leading of services and other Christian activities. Spontaneity and lack of preparation is equated with spirituality. Lev. 6—7 denies this: care and attention to detail are indispensable to the conduct of divine worship. God is more important, more distinguished, worthy of more respect than any man; therefore we should follow his injunctions to the letter, if we respect him."<sup>98</sup>

The New Testament later revealed that all the Israelite sacrifices and priesthood pointed to Jesus Christ's sacrifice and priesthood (Heb. 5—10). Worthy subjects of further study in connection with the five offerings are (1) how Jesus Christ fulfilled each one and (2) what we can learn about our worship of God from these offerings.<sup>99</sup>

### **B. THE INSTITUTION OF THE AARONIC PRIESTHOOD CHS. 8—10**

The account of the consecration of the priests and the priesthood (chs. 8—10) follows the regulations concerning offerings. This section of Leviticus clarifies the way all approaches to God were to be mediated under the Old Covenant.

"With the laws of the sacrifices in place, the next section of Leviticus focuses on who has the right to offer sacrifices in the holy place and in what way such people were qualified to do so."<sup>100</sup>

We have a change in literary genre here from legal to narrative material. The legal material in chapters 1—7 has prepared the reader to understand the narrative in chapters 8—10.

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<sup>97</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, 2:331-32.

<sup>98</sup>Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 128.

<sup>99</sup>See the cross references on the pages of these notes dealing with chapters 1—7 for a start.

<sup>100</sup>Ross, p. 197.

The consecration ceremonies involved many of the sacrifices just described. The institution of the Aaronic priesthood constituted the fulfillment of God's commands recorded in Exodus 28—29 and 40. Almost every verse in chapter 8 is a quotation or allusion to commands first given in Exodus 29. Chapter 9 contains freer summaries of the laws in Leviticus 1—7. Thus we learn that Moses adhered strictly to God's instructions.

Until now Israel followed the custom common in the ancient Near East that the father of a family functioned as a priest for his family. The Levites as a tribe now assumed this role for the families of Israel under the leadership of Aaron and his sons.

"God's grace and forgiveness are such that even a sinner like Aaron [who apostatized by building the golden calf] may be appointed to the highest religious office in the nation. Perhaps the closest biblical parallel to Aaron's experience was that of Peter. In spite of his threefold denial of his Lord at Christ's trial, he was reinstated as leader of the apostles after the resurrection."<sup>101</sup>

"Kings . . . sometimes offered sacrifices: David, when he transferred the ark of the covenant, offered burnt and peace offerings and blessed the people (2 Sam. 6:17); and Solomon, at the dedication of the temple, did likewise (1 Kings 8:5, 62-66). But these were exceptions, as these kings were actively involved in establishing temple worship in the nation.

"On the other hand, Saul (1 Sam. 13:8-14), Adonijah (1 Kings 1:9), Uzziah (2 Chron. 26:16-21), and Ahaz (2 Kings 16:13-14; 2 Chron. 28:1-5) also performed the priestly ritual of offering sacrifices—but without the LORD's approval as some of the prophetic responses indicate."<sup>102</sup>

The three chapters in this section parallel each other in form and content as well as containing contrasts. The effect of this triptych is to present an especially impressive panorama of this great event.<sup>103</sup>

The phrase "Moses did as the Lord commanded him" occurs 16 times in this section (8:4, 5, 9, 13, 17, 21, 29, 34, 36; 9:6, 7, 10, 21; 10:7, 13, 15). It stresses Moses' faithfulness to God (cf. Heb. 3:1-6).

### **1. The consecration of the priests and the sanctuary ch. 8**

God gave a double command to Moses (vv. 1-3), which Moses obeyed (vv. 4-30). Then Moses gave Aaron a command (vv. 31-35), which Aaron obeyed (v. 36). Within the first section (vv. 1-30) there is a chiastic structure. God commanded Moses to take Aaron and his sons (v. 2) and to assemble the congregation (v. 3). Moses then assembled the

<sup>101</sup>Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 132.

<sup>102</sup>Ross, p. 199.

<sup>103</sup>A triptych is a group of three pictures each of which has its own individual scene and beauty but when placed side by side reveal that each one is also part of a larger picture that all three complete.

congregation (vv. 4-5) and carried out God's orders concerning Aaron and his sons. The second main section (vv. 31-36) acts as a transition by bridging the gap between Aaron's ordination and its completion a week later (cf. 9:1).

### **The assembling of the congregation 8:1-5**

Evidently a representative group of the Israelite congregation, likely the elders, responded to Moses' summons to witness Aaron's ordination in the tabernacle courtyard.<sup>104</sup>

### **Aaron's washing and clothing 8:6-9**

God specified certain garments for Aaron that distinguished him from everyone else. A uniform draws attention to a person's office or function and plays down his or her individual personality. Physical washing (v. 6) was symbolic of spiritual cleansing.<sup>105</sup>

"Active and ongoing sanctification is an essential part of being set apart for ministry; and the first step in sanctification is removing defilement and sin."<sup>106</sup>

The priest's investiture with the garments of glory (vv. 7-9) pictured his endowment with the qualities required for the discharge of his duties.

### **The anointing 8:10-13**

The anointing of the tabernacle and the priests with oil (vv. 10-12) signified their sanctification whereby God set them apart to holy purposes and filled them with the power of His Spirit.<sup>107</sup> The significance of the sevenfold sprinkling seems to have been that seven was "the covenant number,"<sup>108</sup> the guarantee of the completeness of the work, as in the seven days of creation. The leaders anointed the vessels because they became the instruments of blessing to the Israelites. The Israelites may have repeated this ritual with each new generation of priests, though Moses did not state this in the text.

The procedure for consecrating consisted of two parts.

1. The priests experienced consecration to their office by washing, clothing, and anointing (vv. 6-13).

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<sup>104</sup>See my comments on the "congregation" at 4:13.

<sup>105</sup>The reference to being washed with water may imply full immersion. See Rooker, p. 142; Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1—16*, p. 501.

<sup>106</sup>Ross, p. 210. Cf. Exod. 30:17-21.

<sup>107</sup>Filling and indwelling are two distinct ministries of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit did not permanently indwell these priests, as He does all believer-priests today, but He did temporarily fill them (i.e., control them). See John F. Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit*, pp. 70-73.

<sup>108</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, 2:336.

2. Israel's leaders then consecrated the sacrificial rites by which the priests experienced consecration (vv. 14-36).

### **The ordination offerings 8:14-30**

Moses as the mediator of the covenant performed the sacrificial ceremony recorded in these verses. He presented three offerings.

1. He offered a young ox as a sin (purification) offering (vv. 14-17).
2. He offered a ram as a burnt offering (vv. 18-21).
3. Then he offered another ram as a peace (fellowship) offering (vv. 22-30).

Moses applied blood from the peace offering to Aaron's ear, hand, and foot (v. 23).

"... the *ear*, because the priest was always to hearken to the word and commandment of God; the *hand*, because he was to discharge the priestly functions properly; and the *foot*, because he was to walk correctly in the sanctuary."<sup>109</sup>

The sprinkling of the priests and their garments with blood and oil (v. 30) represented endowment with the benefits of atoning blood and the Holy Spirit's power.

### **Further instruction to Aaron 8:31-36**

A meal concluded the consecration of the priests because in it the priests entered into more intimate fellowship with God. This relationship entitled them to blessings and privileges that God did not grant the other Israelites.

The consecration lasted seven days. During this time the priests were not to leave the tabernacle courtyard day or night (v. 35). Their role was that of worshipers rather than priests. Evidently Moses repeated the consecration ritual on each of these seven days (v. 33). This would have emphasized its importance to the Israelites.

"A man may defile himself in a moment, but sanctification and the removal of uncleanness is generally a slower process."<sup>110</sup>

Note that it was God who consecrated the priests. This was His work. The "congregation" witnessed the consecration, but they did not initiate it.

The priests were responsible to wash, but God cleansed them. Confession of sin is our responsibility, but God provides the cleansing (1 John 1:9).

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<sup>109</sup>Ibid., 2:340.

<sup>110</sup>Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 144.

God did not demand perfection of the priests. He even graciously appointed the man most responsible for the golden calf incident to the office of high priest.

God provided the clothing (covering), the atonement, and the enablement that made the priests acceptable in their service. Likewise He provides all that we as His priests need also.

"In this section one doctrine emerges very clearly: the universality and pervasiveness of sin. The men chosen to minister to God in the tabernacle pollute the tabernacle and therefore purification offerings have to be offered. Their clothes and bodies are stained with sin and they must be smeared with blood to purify them. These sacrifices are not offered just once; they have to be repeated, because sin is deep-rooted in human nature and often recurs. There is no once-for-all cleansing known to the OT. It is the incorrigibility of the human heart that these ordination ceremonies bring into focus [cf. Ps. 14:3]."<sup>111</sup>

"Those who lead the congregation in spiritual service must be fully consecrated to the LORD."<sup>112</sup>

## **2. The entrance of Aaron and his sons into their office ch. 9**

This chapter explains how the priests carried out the duties associated with their induction into their office. The events recorded took place on the eighth day (v. 1), the day after the seven days of consecration. After a week of cleansing, Aaron could now begin to offer sacrifices himself; he no longer had to rely on Moses to offer sacrifices for him.

As noted previously, the structure of chapter 9 is similar to that of chapter 8. Moses commanded Aaron and the "congregation" (vv. 1-4), and the "congregation" obeyed (v. 5). Then Moses commanded Aaron (v. 7), and Aaron obeyed (vv. 8-21). Finally fire from God fell symbolizing His acceptance of the sacrifices (vv. 22-24).

### **Moses' commands to Aaron and the congregation and their obedience 9:1-6**

Ironically the first sacrifice Aaron had to offer was a calf, as if to atone for making the golden calf (cf. Exod. 32). The sinfulness of man is clear in that Aaron had to offer many different offerings to cover his sins and the sins of the people. Aaron had to bring offerings in addition to all those that Moses had offered the previous seven days. This indicated again that the Levitical offerings did not provide a permanent covering for sin (cf. Heb. 10:1). The purpose of these sacrifices was that the glory of the Lord might appear to His people (vv. 4, 6; cf. Exod. 16:10). The glory of the Lord is His visible presence (in symbol) among His people (cf. Exod. 24:16-17).

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<sup>111</sup>Ibid., pp. 144-45.

<sup>112</sup>Ross, p. 214.



### **Moses' command to Aaron and his obedience 9:7-21**

Aaron first offered a sin offering (vv. 8-11) and then a burnt offering for himself (vv. 12-14). By offering them he acknowledged publicly that he was a sinner and needed forgiveness. Then he presented four offerings for the Israelites (vv. 15-21): sin, burnt, meal, and peace. The variety of the sacrifices and sacrificial animals stands out more than their quantity. This probably indicates that the purpose of these sacrifices was not to atone for specific sins. It was rather for the general sinfulness of the people, to dedicate the people to the worship of Yahweh as He specified, and to pray for God's blessing on them.<sup>113</sup>

### **Fire from the Lord 9:22-24**

After offering these sacrifices, Aaron blessed the people (v. 22). He "stepped down" perhaps from a platform near the altar of burnt offerings on which he may have been standing to address the people. Probably Moses took Aaron into the holy place to present him to the Lord and to pray for God's blessing with him (v. 23).

"The appearance of the glory of Jehovah is probably to be regarded in this instance, and also in Num. 16:19; 17:7; and 20:6, as the sudden flash of a miraculous light, which proceeded from the cloud that covered the tabernacle, probably also from the cloud in the most holy place, or as a sudden though very momentary change of the cloud, which enveloped the glory of the Lord, into a bright light, from which the fire proceeded in this instance in the form of lightening, and consumed the sacrifices on the altar [cf. Judg. 6:20-24; 13:15-23; 1 Kings 18:38-39; 2 Chron. 7:1-3]."<sup>114</sup>

The miracle that caused the strong reaction of the people (v. 24) was not that fire fell on the sacrifices and ignited them. They were already burning. It was that the fire that fell consumed the sacrifices suddenly. In this way God manifested His satisfaction with this first sacrifice that the newly consecrated priests offered. The Hebrew word *ranan*, translated "shouted," means to shout for joy. This is the first occurrence of the word "joy" in the Bible.

"This chapter brings out very clearly the purpose and character of OT worship. All the pomp and ceremony served one end: the appearance of the glory of God."<sup>115</sup>

"The pattern was hereby established: by means of the priests' proper entry into the tabernacle, the nation was blessed. The next chapter (Lev 10) gives a negative lesson of the same truth in the example of Nadab and

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<sup>113</sup>Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 149.

<sup>114</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, 2:348.

<sup>115</sup>Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 151. Essentially worship is communion with God. See Walter C. Kaiser Jr., "Leviticus," in *The Interpreter's Bible*, 1:1067.

Abihu: the blessing of God's people will come only through obedience to the divine pattern."<sup>116</sup>

"The high priest's sacrificial atonement and effectual intercession assure the worshiper of a blessing in God's presence, now by faith, but in the future in glory by sight."<sup>117</sup>

### **3. The sanctification of the priesthood ch. 10**

One of the remarkable features of chapters 8 and 9 is the obedience of Moses and Aaron to God's commands (cf. 8:4, 9, 13, 17, 21, 29, 36; 9:5, 7, 10, 21). In chapter 10 there is a notable absence of these references. The careful reader notices at once that something is wrong.

"The Lord had only just confirmed and sanctified the sacrificial service of Aaron and his sons by a miracle, when He was obliged to sanctify Himself by a judgment upon Nadab and Abihu, the eldest sons of Aaron (Ex. 6:23), on account of their abusing the office they had received, and to vindicate Himself before the congregation, as one who would not suffer His commandments to be broken with impunity."<sup>118</sup>

"Holiness is dangerous unless approached by the proper persons and according to the proper rules."<sup>119</sup>

"Tragedy and triumph go hand in hand in the Bible and in life. On the very first day of Aaron's high-priestly ministry his two eldest sons died for infringing God's law. In the life of our Lord his baptism by the Spirit was followed by temptation in the wilderness, his triumphal entry into Jerusalem by his crucifixion six days later. In the early Church the healing of the lame man was succeeded by the death of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 3—5)."<sup>120</sup>

#### **Fire from the Lord again 10:1-7**

Moses did not identify Nadab and Abihu's exact offense in the text. However the "strange fire" seems most likely to have been an incense offering presented apart from God's command. It may have involved assuming the role of the high priest (cf. Heb. 5:4) or offering incense at a time or in a way contrary to God's prescription.<sup>121</sup> The incident took place on the eighth day of the priests' inauguration (ch. 9; cf. 10:12, 16). Perhaps Nadab and Abihu wanted to add to the festivities by offering an additional incense offering.

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<sup>116</sup>Sailhamer, p. 330.

<sup>117</sup>Ross, p. 227.

<sup>118</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, 2:350.

<sup>119</sup>Norman H. Snaith, *Leviticus and Numbers*, p. 58.

<sup>120</sup>Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 153.

<sup>121</sup>See Rooker, p. 157, for other theories.

Nevertheless their action constituted disobedience to God's word regardless of how good its ends might have seemed to them. They acted in the things of God without first seeking the mind of God.

This incident should warn modern readers against worshipping God in ways that we prefer because they make us feel "good." We must be careful about worship that is designed to produce effects in the worshipers rather than honoring God. Some forms of contemporary worship may reflect the selfish spirits of Nadab and Abihu. Such "self-made worship" often has "the appearance of wisdom" (Col. 2:23).

The same fire that had sanctified Aaron's service brought destruction on Nadab and Abihu because they had not sanctified God (v. 2; cf. Exod. 24:17; Num. 11:1; 16:35; Deut. 5:22; 1 Sam. 15:22; 2 Kings 1:10, 12; Heb. 12:29). Previously it had fallen only after all the sacrifices had been offered, but now it fell instantly. Then it signified God's blessing, but now it manifested His judgment. Then the people rejoiced, but now they were silent.

"Just as 'the fire that came from before the LORD' had been a sign of God's approval of the dedication of the tabernacle and the priests in the previous chapter (9:24), so also 'the fire that came from before the LORD' in this chapter (10:2) was a sign of God's disapproval. The writer's clear purpose in putting these two narratives together is to show the importance that God attached to obeying his commands."<sup>122</sup>

Moses explained God's judgment to Aaron (v. 3). Aaron did not reply because he accepted the righteousness of God's action in judging his sons' sin.

"If we reflect how holy a thing God's worship is, the enormity of the punishment will by no means offend us. Besides, it was necessary that their religion should be sanctioned at its very commencement; for if God had suffered the sons of Aaron to transgress with impunity, they would have afterwards carelessly neglected the whole law. This, therefore, was the reason for such great severity, that the priests should anxiously watch against all profanation."<sup>123</sup>

The fire had not consumed Nadab and Abihu but simply killed them. Aaron was not to demonstrate any dissatisfaction with God's judgment (vv. 4-7). God permitted the people to mourn because of the loss the nation experienced in the death of these priests and so they would remember His punishment a long time. The anointing oil symbolized the Spirit of God who gives life. For this oil to have any contact with death was inappropriate.

Eleazar and Ithamar replaced their older brothers, Nadab and Abihu, in a way similar to the way Judah and Levi replaced their older brothers, Reuben and Simeon (Gen. 49:2-7).

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<sup>122</sup>Sailhamer, p. 330.

<sup>123</sup>John Calvin, cited by Wenham, *The Book . . .*, pp. 156-57.

In both families, Jacob's and Aaron's, the sins of the firstborn and secondborn resulted in God passing over them for blessing. They disqualified themselves from some of the inheritance that could have been theirs had they remained faithful.

### **The Lord's commands to Aaron 10:8-11**

This is the only time that Leviticus records God speaking directly to Aaron by himself. This shows the importance of what follows and that God still approved of Aaron as the high priest.

The "strong drink" referred to (v. 8) was an intoxicating drink. The commentators differ in their understanding of its composition. It was inappropriate for the priests to drink this concoction on duty. The inclusion of this prohibition in this context has led some commentators to assume that Nadab and Abihu must have been under the influence of this drink.<sup>124</sup> This is a possibility. Other students of the passage see the tie as being rash behavior.<sup>125</sup>

"The essence of the priestly ministry is articulated in Leviticus 10:10-11 . . . . Israel, then, was a people separated to Yahweh from among all the nations of the earth. Her lifestyle and, indeed, her very character must advertise to all peoples the meaning of that identity and mission."<sup>126</sup>

Leaders of the Christian church should also be temperate in their use of drink (1 Tim. 3:3, 8; Titus 2:2-3).

"The conclusion one could draw from these passages is that the common or regular use of intoxicants is incompatible with spiritual service or spiritual growth. Their use was permissible in ordinary life, especially for great celebrations; but it may not have been wise or advisable. Moses' warning to the priests of his day should be carefully considered today, in an age when alcoholism is rampant."<sup>127</sup>

"Those set aside for service to the holy God must sanctify the LORD before the people by how they conduct themselves in ministry."<sup>128</sup>

### **Moses' commands to Aaron and Aaron's response 10:12-20**

Following the judgment on Nadab and Abihu, Moses instructed Aaron and his other sons to finish eating the rest of their portion of the sacrifices that they had offered for the nation.

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<sup>124</sup>E.g., Harrison, p. 114; George Bush, *Notes . . . on . . . Leviticus*, p. 88.

<sup>125</sup>E.g., Keil and Delitzsch, 2:354.

<sup>126</sup>Merrill, pp. 57-58.

<sup>127</sup>Ross, pp. 236-37.

<sup>128</sup>Ibid., p. 238.

"When the P [Priestly] code prescribed that every hatta't [sin offering] except that brought for severe sins should be eaten by the priests . . . it took a giant step towards eviscerating the magical and demonic elements from Israelite ritual. For it must be assumed, in keeping with the evidence from the ancient Near East, that ritual detergents were always destroyed after they were used lest their potent remains be exploited for purposes of black magic. By requiring that the hatta't be eaten, Israel gave birth to a new and radical idea: the sanctuary is purged not by any inherent power of the ritual but only by the will of God."<sup>129</sup>

Aaron did not finish eating his portion of the sin offering, however, because of God's judgment of his eldest sons. Perhaps the holiness of God so impressed Aaron that he felt unworthy to eat what he had offered as a sin offering. He concluded that mourners should not take part in sacrificial meals (cf. Deut. 26:14).<sup>130</sup> This explanation is preferable to one that suggests Aaron refused to eat simply because he was grief-stricken by the death of his sons. This motivation probably would not have been as acceptable to Moses as the former. Moses gave Aaron permission to leave the rest of the sin offering uneaten. God is more gracious with those who fear Him and make mistakes than He is with those who do not fear Him as they should.

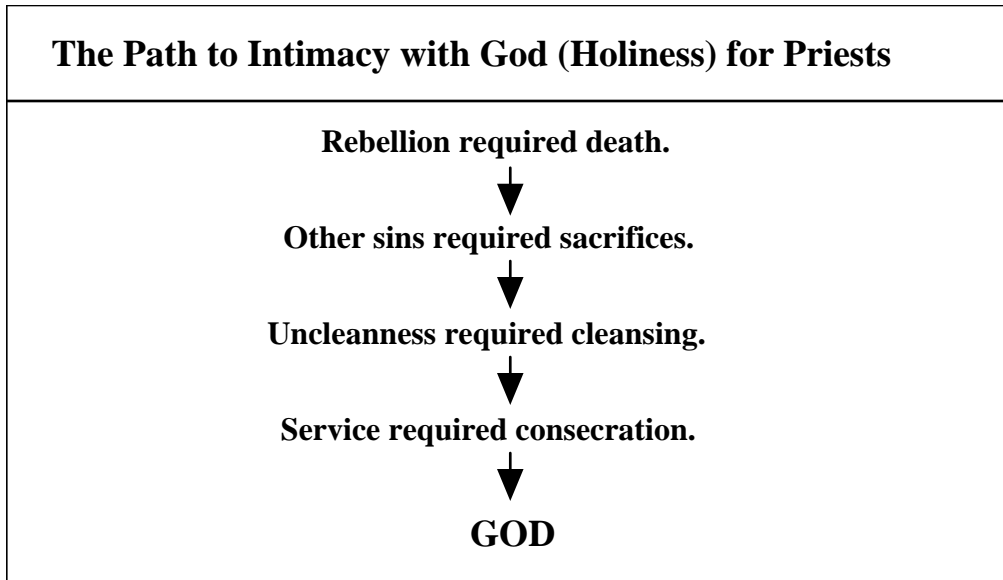
"In the case of purification [sin] offerings priests did not have an automatic right to the meat. It depended on what was done with the blood of the sacrifice. If the blood was smeared inside the tent of meeting, the animal's carcass was burned outside the camp (4:1-21). If, however, the blood was smeared on the altar of burnt offering outside the tent of meeting, the priests were entitled to eat the meat (6:11ff. [Eng. 25ff.]). Ch. 9 mentions two purification offerings, one for Aaron (9:8ff.) and one for the people, namely, a goat (9:15). Moses' anger is aroused because they have not followed the rules with the second offering. They have burned the meat instead of eating it themselves as they were entitled to (vv. 16-18). Since the blood was not brought into the *holy place*, i.e., the outer part of the tent of meeting, *you ought to have eaten it*."<sup>131</sup>

This concludes the narrative of the induction of Aaron and his sons into the priestly office (chs. 8—10). The events of these eight days in Israel's history made an indelible impression on the people and pointed out the necessity of worshipping their holy God as He specified.

<sup>129</sup>Jacob Milgrom, "Two Kinds of Hatta't," *Vetus Testamentum* 26 (1976):337.

<sup>130</sup>Sailhamer, p. 332.

<sup>131</sup>Wenham, *The Book . . .*, pp. 159-60.



### **C. LAWS RELATING TO RITUAL CLEANLINESS CHS. 11—15**

A change of subject matter indicates another major division in Leviticus. We move now from narrative to more legislation. These five chapters pick up the idea introduced in 10:10: ". . . make a distinction between the holy and the profane, and between the unclean and the clean." This section of legislation culminates in chapter 16, the cleansing of the nation on the Day of Atonement. These chapters on purity help explain what uncleanness means and teach how the holiness of God requires cleansing and purification from the contamination of this life.

"The regulations of the sacrifices and institution of the priesthood, by which Jehovah opened up to His people the way of access to His grace and the way to sanctification of life in fellowship with Him, were followed by instructions concerning the various things which hindered and disturbed this living fellowship with God the Holy One, as being manifestations and results of sin, and by certain rules for avoiding and removing these obstructions."<sup>132</sup>

The rationale behind the order of these various laws seems to be the length of time for uncleanness. Violation of dietary laws (ch. 11) resulted in uncleanness for hours, childbirth uncleanness (ch. 12) left the woman unclean for months, and skin and covering uncleanness (chs. 13—14) could mean uncleanness for years. Genital discharges (ch. 15) resulted in uncleanness for hours, weeks, or years.<sup>133</sup>

<sup>132</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, 2:357.

<sup>133</sup>J. E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, p. 137.

### **1. Uncleanness due to contact with certain animals ch. 11**

"This chapter contains a selected list of creatures that divides each type of creature into various classes of purity. According to the final verse in the chapter, the decisive question was whether a class of animals was unclean or clean. The goal of the distinctions was to determine whether an animal could be eaten. The notion of uncleanness and cleanness is specifically applied in this chapter to the question of holiness. Violating any of the regulations relating to clean and unclean animals rendered one unclean (i.e., profane or common, 11:44-45), and thus unable to enter into community worship (12:4). The purpose of the chapter is to tie the concept of holiness to God's own example of holiness (11:45)."<sup>134</sup>

Uncleanness was not all the same under the Old Covenant; there were degrees of uncleanness. The uncleanness that certain defiling things caused required simple purification, for example, washing and waiting a short time. The uncleanness that other defiling things caused required more involved rites.

The reason or reasons for the distinction between a clean and an unclean animal are still somewhat unclear. Even the identity of some of the animals is obscure.<sup>135</sup>

"Many attempts have been made by scholars and expositors over the centuries to interpret the catalogue of abominable creatures in the book of Leviticus, but with uncertain results."<sup>136</sup>

Many ancient nations and religions observed lists of clean and unclean foods. These lists differed from one another but undoubtedly had their origin in the clean unclean distinction that God specified at the Flood (cf. Gen. 7:2-3). The presence of this distinction in the ancient Near East points to a common recognition of the inadvisability of eating certain foods. This recognition shows that the Fall has affected the whole creation, not just humankind (Rom. 8:19-22).

There have been at least six major different explanations for the distinction between clean and unclean animals in the Mosaic Law.<sup>137</sup> Some of these views have very ancient pedigrees.

1. The distinction is arbitrary. God simply told the Israelites what to do to test their obedience (cf. Gen. 2:16-17). They had no idea what the reasons for these

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<sup>134</sup>Sailhamer, p. 332.

<sup>135</sup>G. Bare, *Plants and Animals of the Bible*, p. iii.

<sup>136</sup>Harrison, p. 27.

<sup>137</sup>See Wenham, *The Book . . .*, pp. 166-71; Kim-Kwong Chan, "You Shall Not Eat These Abominable Things: An Examination of Different Interpretations On Deuteronomy 14:3-20," *East Asia Journal of Theology* 3:1 (1985):88-106; Joe M. Sprinkle, "The Rationale of the Laws of Clean and Unclean in the Old Testament," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43:4 (December 2000):637-57; *The New Bible Dictionary*, "Clean and Unclean," by Charles L. Feinberg, pp. 238-41; Rooker, pp. 170-75.

distinctions were.<sup>138</sup> The problem with this approach is that it is negative; it offers no explanation that human beings can understand.

2. The distinction is cultic. The reason the Israelites were to regard some animals as unclean was that the pagans used them in their worship and or associated them with their deities. Avoidance of these unclean animals then was a mark of the Israelites' fidelity to the Mosaic Covenant.<sup>139</sup> The problem with this view is that it explains very little of the evidence. The Israelites may have associated certain unclean animals with pagan cultic practices, but scholars have not been able to explain all the prohibitions on this basis alone.
3. The distinction is hygienic. Those who hold this view believe that the unclean animals were unfit to eat because they carried diseases or were unhealthful.<sup>140</sup> This view has gained popularity in recent times as many readers have become increasingly concerned about health care and medical science.<sup>141</sup> One advocate of this view expressed it as follows.

"In general it can be said that the laws protected Israel from bad diet, dangerous vermin, and communicable diseases. Only in very recent days have better laws of health been possible with the advance of medicine. These were rule-of-thumb laws that God gave in his wisdom to a people who could not know the reason for the provision."<sup>142</sup>

There are good reasons, however, for believing that the Israelites did not view these provisions as hygienic. First, hygiene can explain only some of the distinctions. Second, there is no hint in the Old Testament that God regarded the animals He proscribed as dangerous to health. Third, this view fails to explain why God did not forbid poisonous plants as well as dangerous animals. Fourth, if these animals were dangerous to eat, why did Jesus Christ pronounce them good later (Mark 7:19)?

4. The distinction is symbolical. This view sees the behavior and habits of the clean animals as illustrating how the Israelites were to behave. The unclean animals represented sinful people.<sup>143</sup> Some commentators have adopted this view but have applied the criterion subjectively, without careful regard to the text of the whole Mosaic Law. However when one views the data in the Mosaic Law comprehensively and seeks to understand the distinctions on that basis, this view seems to make sense.

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<sup>138</sup>See Hertz, p. 93; Merrill, p. 58; Rooker, pp. 173, 174.

<sup>139</sup>See Martin Noth, *The Laws in the Pentateuch and Other Studies*, pp. 56-59; Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1—11:26*, p. 157; Ross, p. 255.

<sup>140</sup>See Samuel Kellogg, *The Book of Leviticus*.

<sup>141</sup>See Sim McMillan, *None of These Diseases*; Jay D. Fawver and R. Larry Overstreet, "Moses and Preventive Medicine," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147:587 (July-September 1990)270-85.

<sup>142</sup>Harris, p. 569.

<sup>143</sup>See Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*; Bonar, pp. 214-15; Keil and Delitzsch, 2:372.



5. The distinction is aesthetic, based on the animal's appearance.<sup>144</sup> This view seems entirely subjective.
6. The distinction is ethical. This view is similar to view 4 above. The animals chosen taught reverence for life.<sup>145</sup> This view also seems highly subjective and impossible to prove.<sup>146</sup>

Probably a combination of these reasons is best. The basic idea underlying holiness and cleanness seems to have been wholeness and normalcy.<sup>147</sup> God seems to have regarded imperfection or abnormality in the animal world as unclean.

"Holiness requires that individuals shall conform to the class to which they belong."<sup>148</sup>

This does not explain all the cases, however. For example, why did God declare sheep and goats clean but pigs and camels unclean? One explanation is that sheep and goats conform to the norms of behavior that are typical of pastoral animals (chewing their cud and or having cloven feet). Pigs and camels do not.<sup>149</sup>

"Further analysis demonstrates that each sphere of the animal realm is similarly structured. Water creatures divide into the clean and the unclean, but land and air creatures further subdivide into clean animals that may be eaten and clean animals that may be sacrificed as well as eaten. This threefold division of animals—unclean, clean, and sacrificial—parallels the divisions of mankind, the unclean, i.e., those excluded from the camp of Israel, the clean, i.e., the majority of ordinary Israelites, and those who offer sacrifice, i.e., the priests. This tripartite division of both the animal world and the human realm is no coincidence, as is demonstrated by various laws in the Pentateuch, which apply similar principles to man and beast (Gen. 1:29-30; Exod. 13:2, 13; 20:10; 21:28ff.; 22:28-29 [Eng. 29-30]; Lev. 26:22). Once it is admitted that the animals symbolize the human world, the uncleanness of the birds of prey becomes intelligible: they are detestable because they eat carrion and flesh from which the blood has not been drained properly, acts that make men unclean (Lev. 11:13-19; cf. 11:40 and 17:10ff.)."<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>144</sup>Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 1:136.

<sup>145</sup>Jacob Milgrom, "The Biblical Diet Laws as an Ethical System," *Interpretation* 17 (1963):291

<sup>146</sup>See David P. Wright, "Observations on the Ethical Foundations of the Biblical Dietary Laws: A Response to Jacob Milgrom," in *Religion and Law: Biblical-Judaic and Islamic Perspectives*, p. 197.

<sup>147</sup>Wenham, *The Book . . .*, pp. 18-25, 169; Rooker, p. 192; Ross, p. 253.

<sup>148</sup>Douglas, p. 53.

<sup>149</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 54-55.

<sup>150</sup>Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 170.

As late as New Testament times the Jews appear to have regarded their food laws as symbolic of the division between themselves and Gentiles. The abolition of these laws under the New Covenant illustrates the fact that by His death Christ has broken down the wall of partition that separated Jews and Gentiles for so long.

### **Distinctions between clean and unclean animals 11:1-23**

We have here the same threefold division of animals that inhabit the land, sea, and air as the one that appears in the story of creation (Gen. 1:20-23).

"It has long been recognized . . . that the order of the purity laws in Leviticus 11 follows that of the creation of animal life in Genesis 1 (Rashi). Moreover, just as in Genesis 1 God distinguished 'good' and 'evil' in his new creation, so also in Leviticus 11 God distinguished the 'clean' from the 'unclean.' In addition, Leviticus 11—16 has numerous parallels to the pattern of Genesis 1—11."<sup>151</sup>

11:1-8      Note that God began positively. He told the Israelites what they could eat (vv. 2-3; cf. Gen. 1:29-30; 2:16-17). Then He gave them a list of unclean land animals (vv. 4-8).

Perhaps animals with cloven hoofs were unclean because they had only two digits instead of the basic five and were therefore thought of as abnormal.<sup>152</sup>

Apparently the technical definition of chewing the cud that we use today is not what the Hebrews understood by chewing the cud. Today we use this term to describe animals that do not initially chew their food thoroughly but swallow it and later regurgitate it and then chew it thoroughly. Some of the animals described in Leviticus as chewing the cud do not do that (e.g., camels [i.e., one-humped dromedaries], conies [i.e., rock hyraxes], and hares). However these animals do *appear* to chew their food thoroughly, so this may be what the Israelites thought of as chewing the cud.

Any dead animal was unclean, probably because death was not the normal condition of an animal.

"Sheep, goats, and oxen were the standard sacrificial animals of pastoralists. They have in common cloven hoofs and rumination. Interpreting this theologically one might say that as God had limited his 'diet' to these animals, so must his people. It is man's duty to imitate his creator (vv. 44-45). When the Israelite restricted his food to God's

<sup>151</sup>Sailhamer, p. 39. Rashi was a Jewish exegete who lived about A.D. 1040-1105.

<sup>152</sup>G. S. Cansdale, *Animals of the Bible*, p. 43.

chosen animals, he recalled that he owed all his spiritual privileges to divine election. As God had chosen certain animals for sacrifice, so he had chosen one nation 'out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth' to be 'a kingdom of priests and a holy nation' (Deut. 7:6; Exod. 19:6)."<sup>153</sup>

- 11:9-12      Probably the Israelites could eat water creatures with fins and scales because these are the normal means of propulsion among fishes. As has already been observed (v. 3), the means of locomotion and the mode of eating were the two types of tests used to distinguish between clean and unclean animals. Water creatures without fins and scales did not have the normal means of locomotion for their element.
- 11:13-19      Moses distinguished various kinds of birds in these verses. God prohibited 20 varieties. Again their feeding habits seem to be the key to their uncleanness. The unclean birds ate flesh with the blood in it, something that God also forbade among His people (ch. 17).
- 11:20-23      These verses deal with insects. Perhaps the fact that certain insects swarmed rather than flying in a more direct and natural way made them unclean. Locusts that hopped may have been clean since this is the normal form of locomotion for birds, which they resembled. The varieties of locusts that crawled were unclean, perhaps because that appeared to be abnormal movement for this insect.<sup>154</sup>

### **Pollution by animals and its treatment 11:24-47**

The rest of this chapter addresses questions arising from human contact with unclean animals. Only dead animals polluted human beings (vv. 24, 27, 31, 39). No living unclean animal did. Death is an abnormal condition, and it caused pollution.

- 11:24-28      In this section Moses passed along more specific directions concerning defilement from carrion (animal carcasses). Walking on paws, which look like hands, appears unnatural. This may be the reason land animals that move that way were unclean.
- 11:29-38      These verses deal with swarming creatures and the pollution they create. Swarming may have been regarded as an unnatural, chaotic means of locomotion. The norm would have been orderly progress. Anything on which a swarming insect fell became polluted (unclean, v. 32). Those objects that water would cleanse could be reused, but those that water would not cleanse could not. However if one of these creatures fell into a spring or cistern, an exception was made. Neither the container nor the

<sup>153</sup>Wenham, *The Book . . .*, pp. 172-73.

<sup>154</sup>Douglas, p. 56.

water became impure, only the person who fished the dead animal out would be. God may have granted this exception since declaring water supplies and large containers unclean would have had drastic consequences in the arid regions where the Israelites lived. There was also apparently a distinction between seed for sowing and seed for eating (vv. 37-38).

11:39-47 God gave further directions about the polluting effect of even clean animals that died (vv. 39-40). In a concluding exhortation (vv. 41-45) He called on His people to be holy as He is holy (vv. 44, 45; cf. 19:2; 20:7, 26; 1 Pet. 1:16). Our highest duty is to imitate our creator.

"The solemn statement 'I am the LORD' occurs forty-six times throughout Leviticus [vv. 44, 45, *passim*], identifying Israel's God as the ever living, ever present One. Every aspect of daily life was affected by the reality of the presence of God."<sup>155</sup>

A final summary states the purpose of these laws: to distinguish between the unclean and the clean (vv. 46-47).

"The NT teaches that the OT food laws are no longer binding on the Christian. These laws symbolized God's choice of Israel. They served as constant reminders of God's electing grace. As he had limited his choice among the nations to Israel, so they for their part had to restrict their diet to certain animals."<sup>156</sup>

"Those who have been redeemed by the holy, sovereign God must demonstrate his holiness in their everyday lifestyles (notably in eating)."<sup>157</sup>

## **2. Uncleaness due to childbirth ch. 12**

The laws of purification begun in this chapter connect in principle with the preceding ones that deal with unclean food and animals. The defilement dealt with in this group (chs. 12—15) proceeded from the human body. Pollution could come from within the Israelite as well as from his or her environment. Contamination resulted in separation from the fellowship of the sanctuary and or fellow Israelites.

". . . at first sight no reason or rationale is apparent for the material selected in Leviticus 12. The subject matter of this chapter deals solely with the question of the impurity of childbirth. What was the 'logic' of focusing on this particular topic at this point in the collection of laws?

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<sup>155</sup>Schultz, pp. 30-31.

<sup>156</sup>Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 183.

<sup>157</sup>Ross, p. 261.

Many consider its placement here completely arbitrary. However, the details of the text as well as the larger structural patterns provide helpful clues about its purpose. For example, the terminology of Leviticus 12 alludes to the curse involving childbirth in Genesis 3. This suggests that beyond the parallels in Leviticus 11, the further arrangement of topics in Leviticus may also fit within the pattern of Genesis 1—11. If this be the case, then the purpose behind the narrative's present structure may be to portray the spread of ritual defilement in Israel's camp as a reversal of God's original plan of blessing."<sup>158</sup>

Two different situations caused uncleanness: moral transgression and ceremonial defilement. Moral transgressions caused spiritual defilement (moral uncleanness). However ceremonial defilement (ritual uncleanness) did not necessarily mean that the defiled person had sinned. Some practices that resulted in ceremonial uncleanness were not morally wrong in themselves, such as childbearing. Therefore we must not think "sinful" whenever we read "unclean." "Unclean" does not mean "sinful" but "impure." Impurity restricted the Israelite from participating in corporate worship at the tabernacle.

The ritual purification of the mother of a newborn son lasted a total of 40 days. For the first seven of these she was contagiously unclean. Even though she had not entered the sanctuary after the birth of her child, her presence in the camp had still contaminated the altar (cf. 15:31). That is why she had to offer a sin (purification) offering. Her ritual uncleanness evidently resulted from the woman's bodily discharge that followed the baby's delivery (cf. vv. 4, 5, 7).<sup>159</sup> For the remaining 33 days she was to remain separate from the sanctuary and anything holy. This period served the double purpose of allowing the new mother to regain her health and strength as well as her ritual purity. The Law did not regard a newborn child as unclean, and circumcision was not a purification rite for the child.<sup>160</sup>

Keil and Delitzsch believed that the number 40 ". . . refers to a period of temptation, of the trial of faith, as well as to a period of the strengthening of faith through the miraculous support bestowed by God."<sup>161</sup>

According to this explanation, the strengthening of her faith was the reason for the 40-day recovery period.

All these periods were twice as long if the woman bore a female child. One explanation for this difference is that in the case of a female child the mother had given birth to a sinner who would normally bring forth another sinner herself eventually. Another explanation is that God designed this distinction since "the superiority of their [male's]

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<sup>158</sup>Sailhamer, p. 39. He offered a chart comparing the laws in Leviticus with the Flood and Babel stories in Genesis on pp. 40-41 and again on pp. 338-39.

<sup>159</sup>The lochia is a discharge from the vagina that continues for several weeks after childbirth.

<sup>160</sup>The most extensive discussion of circumcision is in Genesis 17:9-14, not Leviticus 12:3.

<sup>161</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, 2:161. Cf. Exod. 34:28; 1 Kings 19:8; Matt. 4:2; Deut. 8:2.

sex . . . pervades the Mosaic institutions."<sup>162</sup> Advocates see support for this viewpoint in the fact that the redemption price of women was about half that of men in Israel (27:2-7). Another possibility is that the distinction resulted from the curse on Eve and her sex that followed the Fall.<sup>163</sup> Fourth, there is some medical evidence that the postnatal discharge (lochia) lasts longer in the case of a girl.<sup>164</sup> If this was true in ancient Israel, this explanation may explain the difference.<sup>165</sup>

Why should a bloody discharge make someone "unclean"? If we apply the principle already observed to this legislation, we could conclude that bleeding suggested an unnatural condition to the Israelites. Loss of blood leads to death, the antithesis of a healthy normal life. Anyone losing blood is at least potentially in danger of becoming less than physically perfect and is, therefore, unclean.<sup>166</sup>

" . . . blood is at once the most effective ritual cleanser ('the blood makes atonement,' 17:11) and the most polluting substance when it is in the wrong place. This is profound. Our greatest woes result from the corruption of our highest good, e.g., speech, sex, technology, atomic power."<sup>167</sup>

"Some commentators have found difficulty with this section of purification laws, since it appears to designate as unclean the act of childbirth that resulted from God's command to be fruitful and multiply (Gn. 1:28). Since children were regarded as a divine heritage and gift (Ps. 127:3), and a fruitful woman was esteemed as blessed of God (cf. Ps. 128:3), it would appear somewhat surprising for the birth of a child to be regarded as a circumstance that was sinful, and therefore needed atonement. The legislation, however, deals with the secretions that occur at parturition, and it is these that make the mother unclean. Thus the chapter should be read within the context of chapter 15, which also deals with bodily secretions."<sup>168</sup>

"It was the sense of the sacredness of the tabernacle and temple space that made purification from moral and ritual impurity essential."<sup>169</sup>

Circumcision (v. 3) was an act of obedience to God by the parents that demonstrated their faith in God's promises to Abraham (Gen. 17). For many years people believed that circumcision was a hygienic practice. However some medical experts now dispute this

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<sup>162</sup>Bush, p. 114.

<sup>163</sup>Bonar, pp. 236-37.

<sup>164</sup>D. I. Macht, "A Scientific Appreciation of Leviticus 12:1-5," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 52 (1933):253-60.

<sup>165</sup>See Sprinkle, p. 644, for several other explanations, and the NET Bible note on 12:5.

<sup>166</sup>Douglas, p. 51.

<sup>167</sup>Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 188.

<sup>168</sup>Harrison, pp. 133-34.

<sup>169</sup>Sprinkle, p. 654.

theory claiming that the practice has little value in promoting good health. Nevertheless some medical studies have indicated that the eighth day after birth is the best time to circumcise a boy because his blood clots best then in his early development.

Some of Israel's neighbor nations also practiced circumcision. However they did so as a puberty rite. Apparently infant circumcision was peculiar to Israel. It precluded any licentious puberty ritual that the other nations may have observed as well as conveying a spiritual message about the faith of the parents.<sup>170</sup>

"This narrative tells us that as long as the woman was unclean, 'she must not touch anything sacred or go to the sanctuary' (12:4). This statement defines impurity with respect to the sanctuary (the tabernacle) and, more importantly, in terms of one's acceptability within the worshiping community. Impurity is not defined in terms of a vague notion of taboo but in terms of acceptance or restriction from worship. The sense of impurity is thus defined with respect to the goal of the covenant and the goal of Creation . . . , that is, the worship of God."<sup>171</sup>

The fact that Mary, the mother of Jesus, brought two birds for the offerings specified here (Luke 2:22-24) indicates that she and Joseph were poor (v. 8). It also shows that she was a sinner since she offered a sin offering (v. 8). God also made provision so the poor could offer birds instead of a lamb for the burnt offering (cf. 1:14-17; 14:21-22).

"God's holy nature demands that all who experience the physical aspects of this life (here the process of childbirth) must be sanctified to enter his presence."<sup>172</sup>

### **3. Uncleaness due to skin and covering abnormalities chs. 13—14**

Many translations and commentaries have regarded the legislation in these chapters as dealing with leprosy, but this is misleading. The confusion has arisen because the term "leprosy" appears in most English texts in these chapters, and English readers automatically think that what we know as modern leprosy is in view. However as the chapters unfold, it becomes increasingly clear that what is in view is not modern leprosy (Hansen's disease).<sup>173</sup> The solution to the problem involves recognizing that the Septuagint version has influenced the English translations of the Hebrew word used here, *tsara'at*. In the Septuagint, the Greek word *lepra* translates *tsara'at*, and the English translations have simply transliterated this Greek word because of similarities with

<sup>170</sup>See Harris, p. 574.

<sup>171</sup>Sailhamer, p. 334. This author proceeded to point out parallels between the creation account and this chapter.

<sup>172</sup>Ross, p. 273.

<sup>173</sup>See S. G. Browne, *Leprosy in the Bible*; E. V. Hulse, "The Nature of Biblical 'Leprosy' and the Use of Alternative Medical Terms in Modern Translations of the Bible," *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 107 (1975):87-105; John Wilkinson, "Leprosy and Leviticus: The Problem of Description and Identification," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 30 (1984):153-69; Rebecca A. and E. Eugene Baillie, M. D., "Biblical Leprosy as Compared to Present-Day Leprosy," *Christian Medical Society Journal* 14:3 (Fall 1983):27-29.

modern leprosy.<sup>174</sup> That *tsara'at* does not mean leprosy becomes especially clear in chapter 14 where we read that *tsara'at* appeared as mold and mildew in clothes and houses, something modern leprosy does not do. What *tsara'at* does describe is a variety of abnormalities that afflicted human skin as well as clothing and houses, coverings of various types. *Lepra* etymologically refers to scaliness, and *tsara'at* may also.<sup>175</sup> Evidently there was enough similarity between these abnormalities for God to deal with them together in this section of Leviticus.

The section contains three parts. Moses frequently divided various material into three subsections in Leviticus. Each part in this section begins, "The Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron" (13:1; 14:1, 33), and it closes, "This is the law for" (13:59; 14:32, 54).

### **The diagnosis and treatment of abnormalities in human skin and clothing ch. 13**

We may further divide this chapter into two parts: the diagnosis and treatment of abnormalities in human skin, and the diagnosis and treatment of abnormalities in clothing and similar articles. A more detailed outline of the chapter follows.<sup>176</sup>

Introduction v. 1

First set of tests for skin disease vv. 2-8

Second set of tests for skin disease vv. 9-17

Third set of tests for skin disease in scars vv. 18-23

Fourth set of tests for skin disease in burns vv. 24-28

Fifth set of tests for skin disease in scalp or beard vv. 29-37

A skin disease that is clean vv. 38-39

Baldness and skin disease vv. 40-44

Treatment of those diagnosed as unclean vv. 45-46

Diagnosis and treatment of skin disease in clothing vv. 47-58

Summary v. 59

Before proceeding, we need to note that by "treatment" we do not mean that God prescribed a way by which people or objects afflicted with "leprosy" could recover. Rather the "treatment" dealt with how people were to relate to God and the sanctuary in view of these problems. He was not dealing with them as a physician but as a public health inspector. His objective was not their physical recovery in this legislation but their proper participation in worship.

Typically in each case we read four things: a preliminary statement of the symptoms, the priestly inspection, the basis of the priest's diagnosis, and the diagnosis itself and the treatment.

<sup>174</sup>The Greeks used a different term for human leprosy, *elephantiasis*, not *lepra*.

<sup>175</sup>See Hulse, p. 93; and Browne, p. 5.

<sup>176</sup>Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 194. Rooker, pp. 186-92, saw seven types of infectious skin diseases in verses 1-44: skin eruptions (vv. 1-8), chronic skin disease (vv. 9-17), boils (vv. 18-23), burns (vv. 24-28), sores (vv. 29-37), rashes (vv. 38-39), and baldness (vv. 40-44).



### Abnormalities in human skin 13:1-46

God dealt with 21 different cases of skin diseases in this pericope. Some of these may have included measles, smallpox, scarlet fever, and other diseases characterized by skin rash.<sup>177</sup> Some authorities believe that exact identification of the various forms of scaly skin disorders described in this chapter is impossible today.<sup>178</sup> Others feel more confident. One authority suggested the following identifications.<sup>179</sup>

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| The swelling, scab, or bright spot (vv. 2-28) | Psoriasis: a chronic, non-infectious skin disease characterized by the presence of well-demarcated, slightly raised reddish patches of various sizes covered by dry grayish-white or silvery scales.   |
| An infection on the head or beard (vv. 29-37) | Favus: a much more severe and damaging infection in which the fungus invades both the hair and the full thickness of the skin.   |
| Bright spots on the skin (vv. 38-39)          | Leucoderma: a slightly disfiguring condition in which patches of otherwise normal skin lose their natural coloring and become completely white.  |
| 13:1  | The priests had the responsibility of distinguishing between the clean and the unclean, and they had to teach the people the difference (10:10-11).  |
| 13:2-8  | Serious skin disease apparently began with some sort of swelling or a shiny patch on the skin (v. 2). Serious skin disease resulted in uncleanness, but less important complaints might not.   |
| 13:9-17                                       | These tests were appropriate when raw flesh appeared in an infected area of the skin. White hair in the raw flesh area was a sure sign of serious skin disease.<br><br>If the afflicted person became completely white rather than blotchy, the priest was to consider him or her clean. Evidently it was the patchy condition of the skin that made the person unclean. Another explanation is that a totally white condition indicated that the disease was over. <sup>180</sup> |

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<sup>177</sup>Harris, p. 577.

<sup>178</sup>Browne, pp. 5-6.

<sup>179</sup>Hulse, pp. 96-97.

<sup>180</sup>Bush, p. 119; Keil and Delitzsch, 2:380.

- 13:18-28 Similarly white hair in a deep infection or scar indicated serious skin disease. Psoriasis can occur on scars and at sites of burns and other previous injuries.<sup>181</sup>
- 13:29-37 Yellowing hair indicated another skin abnormality. Black hair in the suspected area indicated that there was no serious skin disease there, and so the person was clean.
- 13:38-39 Patches of skin go completely white when a person contracts leucoderma (eczema). The law did not regard this type of skin disorder serious enough to render the afflicted person unclean.
- 13:40-44 Baldness did not result in uncleanness, but serious skin disease on the head did. Psoriasis may be in view here.<sup>182</sup>
- 13:45-46 Tearing the clothes, messing the hair, and covering the upper lip were all signs of mourning (cf. 10:6; 21:10; Gen. 37:34; Num. 14:6; 2 Sam. 1:11; 2 Kings 11:14; 19:1; 22:11, 19; Ezra 9:5; Ezek. 24:17, 22; Mic. 3:7). Not everywhere outside the camp was unclean; there were clean places outside the camp (e.g., 4:12). However the unclean person was to live in an unclean area outside the camp. The idea was that he or she could not come close to God who resided in the tabernacle at the center of the camp.

"The holiest area, where one was closest to God, was the tabernacle. It was here that the holy men, the priests, worked. The tabernacle was surrounded by the camp where Israel the holy people of God lived. This in turn was encircled by the area outside the camp. which was populated by non-Jews, sinners, and the unclean. To live outside the camp was to be cut off from the blessings of the covenant. It is little wonder that when a man was diagnosed as unclean he had to go into mourning. He experienced a living death; his life as a member of God's people experiencing God's blessing came to an end. Gen. 3 presents a similar picture. . . . As Adam and Eve experienced a living death when they were expelled from Eden, so every man who was diagnosed as unclean suffered a similar fate."<sup>183</sup>

". . . as human skin was the focus of guilt and shame in the beginning, so now diseases of the skin provide an occasion to demonstrate the need for human cleansing. In other words, just as the effects of the first sin were immediately displayed in human skin ('And their eyes were opened and

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<sup>181</sup>Hulse, p. 98.

<sup>182</sup>Ibid.

<sup>183</sup>Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 201.

they knew that they were naked,' Ge 3:7), so the writer uses the graphic horror of skin diseases found in these texts to depict the human state of uncleanness before a holy God.

"According to the regulations in Leviticus, if one were found to be unclean, 'As long as he has the infection he remains unclean. He must live alone; he must live outside the camp' (13:46). In the same way, the Genesis narratives show that when Adam (and Eve) sinned, 'the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. And he drove Adam out' (Ge 3:23-24). Like the unclean person in Leviticus, they had to live 'outside the camp.'"<sup>184</sup>

"Holiness in Leviticus is symbolized by wholeness. Animals must be perfect to be used in sacrifice. Priests must be without physical deformity. Mixtures are an abomination. Men must behave in a way that expresses wholeness and integrity in their actions. When a man shows visible signs of lack of wholeness in a persistent patchy skin condition, he has to be excluded from the covenant community. Temporary deviations from the norm do not attract such treatment, but if the symptoms last for more than two weeks, he must go to live outside the true Israel. . . . Anyone might fall victim to these complaints and face the prospect of being cut off from his family and friends for the rest of his days. Yet it was considered so important to preserve the purity of the tabernacle and the holiness of the nation that individuals and families might be forced to suffer a good deal. Individual discomfort was not allowed to jeopardize the spiritual welfare of the nation, for God's abiding presence with his people depended on uncleanness being excluded from their midst (cf. Isa. 6:3-5)."<sup>185</sup>

The Israelites evidently regarded "leprosy" as representing sin. It resulted in the leper's separation from God and from other people. In many respects leprosy and sin were similar in both their character and consequences.

"Before the people of God can enter the presence of the holy God they must be free of all disease. . . . Bodily diseases are incompatible with the holy presence of the LORD."<sup>186</sup>

The sacrifice of Jesus Christ has made it possible for us to enter God's presence (cf. Isa. 53:5: "By His scourging we are healed [spiritually now but also physically in the future, at our resurrection]").

"In the church today no rule prevents people with skin diseases from entering the place of worship, because it is simply an assembly of believers and not the sanctuary with the holy of holies and the actual

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<sup>184</sup>Sailhamer, p. 337.

<sup>185</sup>Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 203.

<sup>186</sup>Ross, p. 282.

dwelling of the glory of the LORD. Yet common sense should tell someone with a contagious illness to remain at home or in the hospital. That is the practical side of Leviticus. Nevertheless, the theological understanding behind any illness is that it is part and parcel of the fallen condition of human life in this world."<sup>187</sup>

### **Abnormalities in clothing 13:47-59**

God mentioned three different cases of diseased garments in this section of the chapter.

Material objects do not contract illnesses, but they do occasionally become abnormal due to mold, mildew, or some other invasive agent. Mosaic law did not view these abnormalities as necessarily dangerous to the health of the Israelites. They did, however, represent deviation from a proper condition.

"Decay or corruption [in and of the environment] is incompatible with the holiness of the LORD and must be removed."<sup>188</sup>

### **The ritual cleansing of abnormalities in human skin 14:1-32**

"If Lev. 13 is bleak, speaking of separation from the holy presence, Lev. 14 is full of hope, for in it the sufferer is restored to the covenant community. The Israelite learned even more about the nature of the holy God through these provisions for restoration to fellowship in the community."<sup>189</sup>

The procedures described here were not curative but ritual. God prescribed no treatment for the cure of leprosy here, but He explained how the priests and the Israelites could recognize healed skin so formerly afflicted individuals could resume worship in the community.<sup>190</sup> The ritual involved two acts separated by an interval of seven days.

14:1-9      The first act took place outside the camp and restored the formerly unclean person to the fellowship of the other Israelites from whom he had experienced separation because of his skin disease.

Clean animals, including birds, represented Israel.<sup>191</sup> Both of the birds used in this ritual evidently symbolized the Israelite who was about to reenter the covenant community. The bird killed probably represented the formerly unclean person whose fate was death but for God's mercy. The

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<sup>187</sup>Ibid., p. 283.

<sup>188</sup>Ibid., p. 297.

<sup>189</sup>Ibid., p. 285.

<sup>190</sup>Anthropologists refer to such rites as "rites of aggregation," ceremonies in which people in abnormal social conditions experience reintegration into ordinary society. Shaving, washing, and offering sacrifices are regular parts of such rites. See E. R. Leach, *Culture and Communication*, pp. 78-79.

<sup>191</sup>Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 208.

bird released stood for the same person cleansed, released from the bondage of his disease, endowed with new life, and at liberty to enter the covenant fellowship again. These two birds served a symbolic function similar to that of the two goats on the Day of Atonement (ch. 16).<sup>192</sup>

Cedar wood had antiseptic qualities and was slow to decay, so it probably represented the continuance of life. The scarlet color of the thread looked like blood and symbolized sacrificial blood. The hyssop represented purification from the corruption of death since the priests used this spongy plant for purification in Israel's rituals. The blood-water used to sprinkle the individual probably signified life and purification.

- 14:10-32 The second act of cleansing took place before the altar of burnt offerings and restored the former leper to fellowship with the sanctuary and God. First the leper was to offer a trespass offering (v. 12). This offering compensated God for all the sacrifices, tithes, and firstfruits that the afflicted person could not present during his uncleanness.<sup>193</sup> Another view is that the law prescribed a trespass offering because some sickness resulted from sin (cf. Num. 12:9-15; 2 Kings 5:27; 2 Chron. 26:17-21).<sup>194</sup> The priest then applied blood from this sacrifice to the ear, hand, and foot of the former leper symbolizing the sanctification of his hearing, serving, and walking by the atoning blood. The priest then consecrated the oil to God by sprinkling it seven times before the Lord. He next applied it to the leper's ear, hand, foot, and head representing his anointing with the power and gifts of God's Spirit. Then the priest made sin, burnt, and meal offerings. The sin offering cleansed the sanctuary, the burnt offering brought reconciliation and represented rededication, and the meal offering was a pledge of allegiance.

"The priests were the public health officers, but they served in their priestly capacity. Israel was a holy nation, and even her cleansing from sickness was done with religious ceremony. Sickness was symbolic of sin, and even now it should not be forgotten that sickness and death are part of God's curse on the sin of Adam and his race. Therefore, cleansing the diseased person required sacrifices (cf. Luke 5:12-15)."<sup>195</sup>

"The LORD provided the way for someone restored to health to enter full participation in the covenant community through the ritual of sacrificial atonement. . . .

<sup>192</sup>D. J. Davies, "An Interpretation of Sacrifice in Leviticus," *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 89 (1977):397; J. R. Porter, *Leviticus*, p. 108.

<sup>193</sup>Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 210.

<sup>194</sup>Milgrom, *Cult and . . .*, p. 80.

<sup>195</sup>Harris, p. 582.

"Christians do not have such a ritual, but they can learn something from the principle. Any time they are healed and restored to full participation in life and worship, it is appropriate to offer the sacrifice of praise, even a thank offering (Heb. 13:15). They should at least acknowledge that it is God who has given them life and they will not now die (Ps. 118:17), that they have been restored to life for the purpose of serving and praising God (Isa. 38:9-20), that their restoration from sickness is a foretaste of how in some glorious future day they will be set free like a bird from all physical diseases and distress when the curse is lifted, and that all this was made possible through the shed blood of Christ."<sup>196</sup>

### **The ritual cleansing of abnormalities in houses 14:33-53**

The fact that certain abnormal conditions afflicted houses as well as persons reminded the Israelites that their dwelling places as well as their bodies needed to be holy. This law anticipated life in Canaan when the Israelites would live in houses rather than tents. God would "put" the abnormal condition on a house as He did on a person. It did not just pass from person to dwelling by contagion (v. 34). God prescribed the same rite of purification for a house as for a person (vv. 49-53). He did not require sacrifices because buildings simply have to be clean.

". . . although it is primarily in the human body that sin manifests itself, it spreads from man to the things which he touches, uses, inhabits, though without our being able to represent this spread as a physical contagion."<sup>197</sup>

Wholeness and holiness are not the same, but wholeness reflects holiness.

### **Summary of these ordinances 14:54-57**

The final four verses of this section draw the instructions concerning abnormalities in skin and other coverings (chs. 13—14) to a conclusion by summarizing them and explaining the purpose of the collection. The emphasis in this whole section is on God's provision for cleansing so that something corrupt could be consecrated to use again.

"God requires that anything that has been defiled be cleansed and then reconsecrated to its full use based on the prescribed ritual of the faith."<sup>198</sup>

"As the Flood was once necessary to cleanse God's good creation from the evil that had contaminated it, so the ritual washings were a necessary part of checking the spread of sin and its results in the covenant community."<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>196</sup>Ross, pp. 291-92.

<sup>197</sup>Bush, 2:391.

<sup>198</sup>Ross, p. 302.

<sup>199</sup>Sailhamer, p. 338.

". . . with the coming of Christ, God himself sought out the 'lepers' and healed them. Jesus came to seek and save that which was lost. His outreach to the lepers was on a par with his ministry to other sick people and social outcasts, such as tax-collectors and prostitutes. . . . Jesus' ministry and that of his disciples (Matt. 10:8) was one which brought reconciliation between God and man. Therefore the old laws isolating men because of their unsightly appearance had become inappropriate and out of date."<sup>200</sup>

#### **4. Uncleaness due to bodily discharges associated with reproduction** **ch. 15**

This chapter concludes the regulations on uncleaness (chs. 11—15).

"The uncleaness laws start with uncleaness that is permanent: that associated with various animals and food (ch. 11). Then they deal with the uncleaness of childbirth, which may last up to eighty days (ch. 12). Chs. 13 and 14 deal with uncleaness of indefinite duration; it all depends how long the serious skin disease persists. Finally, ch. 15 deals with discharges associated with reproduction, pollutions which usually only affect a person for up to a week. Whatever the explanation of the order of the material within chs. 11—15, these laws illuminate the day of atonement rituals, which are designed to cleanse the tabernacle 'of the uncleannesses of the Israelites' (16:16). Without these chapters we should be at a loss to know what was the purpose of the ceremonies described in ch. 16."<sup>201</sup>

Moses described four cases of secretions from the reproduction organs that resulted in ritual uncleaness in this chapter. Two of these cases arose from disease and two from natural causes. The chapter opens with an introductory statement (v. 1) and closes with a summary (vv. 32-33), which we have come to recognize as typical in this part of Leviticus. In the four central sections, there is a definition of the type of pollution, a description of its consequences, and an explanation of the appropriate rite of purification. The rite usually involved simply washing and waiting until evening.

The first two cases concern continuing and occasional emissions of the male. Moses followed these with the last two cases that reverse this order and deal with the female. The writer apparently used this chiasmic literary structure to reflect the unity of humankind in two sexes. Verse 18, the center of the chiasm, mentions sexual intercourse, the most profound expression of the unity and interdependence of the sexes.

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<sup>200</sup>Wenham, *The Book . . .*, pp. 213-14.

<sup>201</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 216.

15:1-15 The first case is the secretion caused by some disease affecting a man's sexual organs.<sup>202</sup> The writer did not describe the physical problem in detail. The terms used seem to refer to either a diseased flow of semen (gonorrhea) or a discharge of pus from the urethra.<sup>203</sup> In either case this was a fairly lengthy ailment (v. 3).

Another possibility is that this first case describes some affliction that both men and women suffered, such as diarrhea. The Hebrew words translated "any man" (v. 2) permit this. However the structure of the chapter and the references to the sexual organs argue against this view.

Note that things that the man sat on in his defilement, those things under him (bed, chair, saddle), became unclean and a source of defilement themselves. Also any direct contact with an unclean man resulted in uncleanness for those who touched his person (v. 7).<sup>204</sup>

"It is the uncleanness of the man and its consequences that are the main concern of this section. The striking thing about the uncleanness associated with these discharges is that not only the affected person becomes unclean, but also people and objects that come in contact with him, and these in their turn can become secondary sources of uncleanness. In this regard the uncleanness described here is much more 'infectious' than the uncleanness of skin diseases dealt with in chs. 13—14. . . . In this respect, then, gonorrhea in men and menstrual and other female discharges are viewed as much more potent sources of defilement than others."<sup>205</sup>

Nevertheless the uncleanness that these discharges caused was less serious ritually than those associated with skin disease. The man could live at home; he did not need to move outside the camp. He just had to wash and wait until evening (vv. 16, 18); he did not need to go through a more elaborate ritual. He also needed to offer only two inexpensive sacrifices (v. 14; cf. 14:10-20).

15:16-18 The second case deals with a voluntary emission of semen. Note that it was not sexual intercourse generally that produced the uncleanness but specifically the emission of semen in coitus or at other times (cf. Exod. 19:5; 1 Sam. 21:5-6; 2 Sam. 11:4).

<sup>202</sup>The Hebrew word *basar*, translated "flesh" (v. 2, et al.) has a wide range of meanings. In this context it clearly refers to the woman's vagina (v. 19) and so apparently to the man's penis in verses 2-3.

<sup>203</sup>Harrison, p. 160.

<sup>204</sup>Here *basar* evidently refers to any part of the man.

<sup>205</sup>Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 218.



"The intent was to keep a legitimate but 'unclean' biological function from defiling that which was [otherwise] holy."<sup>206</sup>

The purification process involved no sacrifice, only washing and waiting until evening (vv. 16, 18).

"The practical effect of this legislation was that when a man had religious duties to perform, whether this involved worship or participation in God's holy wars, sexual intercourse was not permitted."<sup>207</sup>

"The banning of the sexual and the sensual from the presence of God (Ex. 19:15, [*sic*] 20:26; Lev. 15:16-18) may have been one of the most noteworthy characteristics of Israel's religion, uniquely distinguishing it from the other religions of the ancient Near East."<sup>208</sup>

"God was saying very clearly that sex, any aspect of sex, any bodily functions connected with sex, had to be kept completely apart from the holy place. He was not saying that sex and bodily functions were dirty or sinful, as some see in this passage."<sup>209</sup>

15:19-24      The third case deals with the woman's menstrual cycle (cf. 2 Sam. 11:4).

"By placing the woman in what amounted to a state of isolation, the legislation made it possible for her to enjoy some respite from her normal duties, and gave her an opportunity of renewing her energy."<sup>210</sup>

This law appears very harsh to the modern reader. It appears to consign virtually every woman in Israel to a state of being untouchable for one week each month. Some authorities, however, believe that women in ancient Israel had menstrual periods far less frequently than modern women. They believe that earlier marriage, later weaning (up to the age of two or three), and the prevalence of large families made these unclean periods far more infrequent.<sup>211</sup> Those most affected by this law were

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<sup>206</sup>Harrison, p. 162. See James R. Johnson, "Toward a Biblical Approach to Masturbation," and Clifford L. Penner, "A Reaction to Johnson's Biblical Approach to Masturbation," both in *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 10:2 (Summer 1982):137-146 and 147-149. Johnson's position was that this passage does not condemn masturbation, but he did not argue for the practice.

<sup>207</sup>Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 219.

<sup>208</sup>Schultz, p. 78.

<sup>209</sup>Ross, p. 307.

<sup>210</sup>Harrison, p. 164.

<sup>211</sup>Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 224.

probably unmarried teenage girls. The result would have been that God-fearing young men would have been wary of making physical contact with them. This law then would have had the effect of curbing the passions of the young.

- 15:25-33 The fourth case involves a woman who had continuing menstrual problems beyond her normal period. The ritual for purification was the same as for a man with an extended sexual malady (case one above, vv. 13-15; cf. Mark 5:25; Luke 8:43).

Verse 31 explains the reason for these regulations. God gave them so the Israelites would not fall into serious sin because of ignorance of how they should behave when unclean. The rules about bodily discharges helped the Israelites appreciate the seriousness of intermarriage with the Canaanites and the prohibitions against foreign customs and religion, which conflicted with Israel's holy calling. God discouraged certain acts by designating them as resulting in uncleanness, which undoubtedly proved helpful in the area of private morality where legal sanctions are not as effective as in public life.<sup>212</sup>

"The sexual processes thus make men [and women] unclean, but that is not the same as saying they are sinful. Uncleanness establishes boundaries of action, but as long as these are not transgressed no guilt is incurred."<sup>213</sup>

"One valuable feature of this legislation that had an important bearing upon Israel's cultic and social life was the rule which made partners in coition unclean for the whole day. This contingency separated sexual activity from cultic worship in a unique manner, and this precluded the orgiastic fertility rites that were so much a part of religion among peoples such as the Canaanites. Furthermore, the continuous state of ceremonial uncleanness experienced by the prostitute in Israel would remove any possibility of her participation in Hebrew worship, and take away anything approaching respectability from her way of life, if, indeed, she was at all sensitive to the requirements of the sanctuary."<sup>214</sup>

What made these secretions unclean was perhaps their association with unnatural (irregular) bodily functions. Childbearing (ch. 12) and the bodily fluids involved in procreation (ch. 15) were ritually unclean because they have connection with what is abnormal in terms of regularity. They were not unclean because sex is sinful. It is not (Gen. 1:28).

Note the slightly different views of two other writers. Their emphases may be part of the total answer as to why these practices rendered an Israelite unclean.

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<sup>212</sup>Douglas, p. 124.

<sup>213</sup>Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 220.

<sup>214</sup>Harrison, pp. 165-66.

"Within this framework it becomes clear why the conditions described in Lev. 12 and 15 are polluting. They all involve the loss of 'life liquids.' 'Life is in the blood' (Lev. 17:11, 14). Thus a woman suffering from any bloody discharge, whether it be the puerperal discharge (Lev. 12:4-5), menstruation (15:19-24), or some other malady (15:25-30), is presumed to be losing life. Bleeding may eventually lead to death. So the discharging woman is regarded as unclean in that she evidently does not enjoy perfect life: indeed unchecked her condition could end in her death. Similarly too we presume that male semen was viewed as a 'life liquid.' Hence its loss whether long-term (15:1-15) or transient (15:16-18) was viewed as polluting."<sup>215</sup>

"God was teaching the household of faith the distinction between the physical and the holy. Anything connected with sexual function was part of the physical world; it was categorized as common, not holy. Sex could never be brought into the sanctuary, for unlike the Canaanite view, sexual activity was not a way to enhance spirituality or commune with God . . . "<sup>216</sup>

Sin is wrong done to God, but ritual uncleanness was a condition that while related to sin was not itself sinful. Sin separated the person further from God than uncleanness did. These conditions did not result in the sinfulness of the Israelite but in his or her disqualification from public worship in the nation.

Jesus' attitude toward the laws about bodily uncleanness was the same as His attitude toward the food laws (cf. Matt. 15:17-20). When He came He announced the end of their authority because God would open the church to Jews and Gentiles equally. These Israelite laws separated Jews from Gentiles by illustrating Israel's unique function in God's program, which ended temporarily (until the Millennium) with the death of Christ.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>215</sup>Gordon J. Wenham, "Why Does Sexual Intercourse Defile (Lev. 15:18)?" *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 95:3 (1983):434.

<sup>216</sup>Ross, p. 311.

<sup>217</sup>See Rooker, pp. 207-10, for a longer explanation of how Jesus Christ fulfilled and ended these laws.

| <b>The Pathway to Intimacy with God (Holiness) for Believers</b>  |   |
|---|---|
| <b>According to the Old Covenant</b>  | <b>According to the New Covenant</b>  |
| <p><b>Trust in God's promise that the death of the Passover lamb redeemed them.</b></p> <p>↓</p> <p><b>Repudiation of God's revealed will could result in divine fatal judgment (a sin unto death).</b></p> <p>↓</p> <p><b>Breaking God's revealed moral will required confession and sacrifice.</b></p> <p>↓</p> <p><b>Violating laws requiring cleanliness required ritual purification.</b></p> <p>↓</p> <p><b>Serving God required additional limits on one's personal freedom.</b></p> <p>↓</p> <p><b>Closest contact with God required additional self-sacrifices.</b></p> <p>↓</p> <p><b>GOD</b></p> | <p><b>Trust in God's promise that the death of Jesus Christ redeems us.</b></p> <p>↓</p> <p><b>Repudiation of God's revealed will can result in divine fatal judgment (a sin unto death).</b></p> <p>↓</p> <p><b>Breaking God's revealed moral will requires confession.</b></p> <p>↓</p> <p><b>Violating laws requiring separation requires repentance.</b></p> <p>↓</p> <p><b>Serving God requires additional limits on one's personal freedom.</b></p> <p>↓</p> <p><b>Closest contact with God requires additional self-sacrifices.</b></p> <p>↓</p> <p><b>GOD</b></p> |

#### **D. THE DAY OF ATONEMENT CH. 16**

The sacrifices and offerings that Moses described thus far in the law were not sufficient to cleanse all the defilements of the people. Much sinfulness and uncleanness still needed removing. Therefore God appointed a yearly sacrifice that cleansed all the sins and impurities not covered by other means that the Israelites committed ignorantly (Heb. 9:7). The sacrifice of the Day of Atonement was in this sense the highest and most comprehensive of the Mosaic sacrifices.

This chapter is a theological pivot on which the whole Book of Leviticus turns. It is the climax of the first part of the book that deals with the public worship of the Israelites

(chs. 1—16). The second major part of Leviticus begins at the end of this chapter and reveals the private worship of the Israelites (chs. 17—27).

The chapter begins with a reference back to chapter 10, the judgment of Nadab and Abihu (v. 1). The material in chapter 16 is legislation that God prescribed shortly after and in view of that apostasy. Chapter 10 showed how important it was for priests to approach God with due care and self-preparation; those who did not died. Chapter 16 contains information about how the high priest must behave to preserve himself from a similar fate. There is this tie to the narrative of Israel's history, but chapter 16 is also a continuation of the legislation designed to differentiate between clean and unclean contained in chapters 11—15. It is another block of legal material, though the style is quite discursive (narrative).

The Day of Atonement took place six months after the Passover. These two great festivals were half a year apart. Whereas the Passover was a day of great rejoicing, the Day of Atonement was a time of great solemnity in Israel.

### **1. Introductory information 16:1-10**

This section contains a general introduction to what follows in the chapter (vv. 1-2), information about the animals and priestly dress used in the ceremonies (vv. 3-5), and an outline of the events of the day (vv. 6-10).

#### **Introduction to the Day of Atonement legislation 16:1-2**

We learn from verse 1 that Moses received instructions regarding the Day of Atonement, *Yom Kippur*, immediately after the judgment of Nadab and Abihu (ch. 10). Obviously he inserted chapters 11—15 in the chronological narrative for a purpose. He probably did so because of the connection between the clean and unclean distinctions in these chapters and the emphasis on priestly purity that ended with the judgment of Nadab and Abihu (ch. 10). There is also continuity in the emphasis on the importance of holiness when entering the presence of Yahweh.

As usual, God revealed these laws to Moses, not directly to the priests or even the high priest, Aaron (v. 2). Moses was the great mediator between God and the Israelites superior even to the high priest. Moses served in the role of a prophet when he did this. Later in Israel's history, the prophets continued to communicate instructions from God not only to the priests but also to the kings.

Even the high priest was not to enter the presence of God in the holy of holies, symbolized by the cloud over the mercy seat, at any time. If he did, he would die, as Nadab and Abihu did. What follows is instruction about when and how he could enter. The only way anyone could approach God when He manifested Himself on Mt. Sinai (Exod. 19) was also as He specified. God was just as holy and demanded just as much reverence when He was dwelling among His people as when He dwelt away from them. Now He dwells within each Christian (John 14:17; Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 12:13).

### **Basic requirements for the ceremonies 16:3-5**

The high priest had to make elaborate preparations for entering the holy of holies by cleansing himself spiritually and physically. The offerings he made were a bull as a sin offering and a ram as a burnt offering, both to cover his own sins (cf. Heb. 5:3). He also had to wear a special uniform, not the ornate garments that he usually wore to carry out his regular duties. This uniform consisted of four white garments and made him appear more as a slave than as a king. This dress was even simpler than that worn by the other priests (cf. Exod. 39:27-29).

"Among his [Aaron's] fellow men his dignity as the great mediator between man and God is unsurpassed, and his splendid clothes draw attention to the glory of his office. But in the presence of God even the high priest is stripped of all honor: he becomes simply the servant of the King of kings, whose true status is portrayed in the simplicity of his dress [cf. Ezek. 9:2-3, 11; 10:2, 6-7; Dan. 10:5; 12:6-7; Rev. 19:8]."<sup>218</sup>

". . . elaborate garments might have detracted from the somberness of the occasion, when atonement for sin was the basic concern."<sup>219</sup>

Aaron had to wash his body symbolizing his cleanness. He also offered two goats as a sin offering and another ram as a burnt offering for the Israelites. The high priest entered the holy of holies only once each year on the Day of Atonement to make these special sacrifices (cf. Heb. 9:7).

### **An outline of the ceremonies 16:6-10**

Aaron first offered the bull as a sin (purification) offering to cover his sins and the sins of the other priests (v. 6). Then he cast lots to decide which of the two goats would die as a sin offering for the people and which one would be sent into the wilderness (vv. 7-8). Then he sacrificed the goat that was to die (v. 9). Finally he brought the other goat before the Lord and then dispatched it into the wilderness (v. 10).

### **2. Instructions concerning the ritual 16:11-28**

More detail follows in this section that helped Aaron know exactly how to conduct the cultic ritual and that helps the reader appreciate the implications of atonement.

### **The blood-sprinkling rites 16:11-19**

Verses 11-14 describe the purification offering that Aaron was to offer for himself and the other priests. The act of offering incense represented the act of offering prayer that

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<sup>218</sup>Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 230.

<sup>219</sup>Schultz, p. 85.

God would mercifully accept the sacrifices offered to cover the nation's sins and uncleanness.

"The purpose of the incense-smoke was to create a screen which would prevent the High Priest from gazing upon the holy Presence."<sup>220</sup>

The second stage of the ceremony, the casting of lots over the goats, was rather simple and apparently required little explanation. The third stage was the sacrificing of one of the goats as a sin offering for the people (vv. 15-19). This sacrifice cleansed the sanctuary of the defilement that the sins of the people caused making it possible for a holy God to continue to dwell among sinful people (vv. 16, 19-20).

The sprinkling of the blood on the mercy seat once (v. 15) was for the expiation of the sins of the people.<sup>221</sup> The sprinkling of the blood before the mercy seat seven times (v. 19) was for the expiation of the sanctuary from the people's sins. The high priest then sprinkled blood on and before the altar of burnt offerings (vv. 18-19).

### **The scapegoat 16:20-22**

These verses describe the fourth and most striking phase of this day's ceremony. The second goat symbolically bore the sins of the people taking them to an unclean place far from God. There is difference of opinion among the authorities about what "Azazel" means (vv. 8, 10, 26). The etymology of this Hebrew word is obscure. Some believe it means a rocky precipice or some other place where the goat died or that it refers to the goat's function. Others think it refers to a demon to whom the Israelites sins were returned so it would not accuse them. Whatever its exact meaning, the symbolism is clear enough. The live goat symbolically removed the sins of the Israelites from God's presence.

The two goats used in the ritual represented two aspects of the atonement that God provided. Both animals taught the Israelites that a sinless agent was removing their sins by vicarious atonement. The goat slain represented the judgment on sin that resulted in death necessary for atonement. The goat sent off into the wilderness with the sinner's guilt imputed to it symbolized the removal of guilt (cf. 14:4-7).<sup>222</sup>

There were two forms of the laying on of hands in the Old Testament. The Jews performed one by placing two hands on persons in non-sacrificial contexts. They performed the other by placing one hand on animals when they sacrificed them (v. 21). The two-handed form emphasized who the recipient of the ritual action was. The one-

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<sup>220</sup>Hertz, p. 156.

<sup>221</sup>See Douglass Judisch, "Propitiation in the Language and Typology of the Old Testament," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 48:2-3 (April-July 1984):221-43, which deals with the Hebrew words translated "cover."

<sup>222</sup>See Lester L. Grabbe, "The Scapegoat Tradition: A Study in Early Jewish Interpretation," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 18:2 (December 1987):152-67. The word "scapegoat" comes from the AV description of the goat that "escaped" into the wilderness. In Hebrew "scapegoat" is *azazel*.

handed form drew attention to the person who put his hand on the animal.<sup>223</sup> Another view is that the imposition of two hands intensified the idea of transferring guilt, specifically for intentional sins.<sup>224</sup>

### **The cleansing of the participants 16:23-28**

The rituals for cleansing those who had had contact with the sacrifices conclude this section.

This entire ceremony pointed out very clearly the holiness of God and, in contrast, the sinfulness of man. Those involved in procuring atonement had to follow scrupulously the directions God gave for approaching Him in worship.

### **3. Instructions concerning the duty of the people 16:29-34**

These verses also contain instructions for the yearly celebration of the Day of Atonement. The fact that the Israelites repeated it year by year points to the incompleteness of the atonement that animal sacrifices made (cf. Heb. 9:7-12).

All the Israelites were to humble their souls (fast and repent) and refrain from work in preparation for this event. This self-affliction included spiritual humbling as well as going without food (cf. Isa. 58:3). Fasting was an indication that the practitioner regarded his need to seek God as more pressing than his need to feed his body. It often accompanied prayer (cf. Ps. 35:13). Refraining from work resulted from the same sense of priority. No human activity was necessary nor did God permit it in addition to the sacrifice that He provided to atone for sin.

The promise of God in verse 30 is one that the Israelite was to believe and by which he could enjoy assurance of his fellowship with God. It is very clear from this verse and similar statements (cf. vv. 16, 22) that God promised forgiveness and cleansing to all who trusted in the efficacy of the sacrifices that He provided and prescribed.<sup>225</sup>

The writer of the Book of Hebrews saw the Day of Atonement as prefiguring Jesus' crucifixion (Heb. 9). Though the Day of Atonement is not something Christians observe, we can learn the nature of sin, the need for atonement, and the superiority of Christ's sacrifice by reflecting on this Jewish ritual in the light of Calvary (cf. Heb. 10:22-25). Some Christians practice self-affliction during Lent for essentially the same reason the Israelites afflicted themselves before the Day of Atonement.

<sup>223</sup>See Rene Peter, "L'Imposition des Mains dans L'Ancien Testament," *Vetus Testamentum* 27:1 (1977):48-55; David P. Wright, "The Gesture of Hand Placement in the Hebrew Bible and Hittite Literature," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 106:3 (July-September 1986):433-46; Sansom, pp. 323-26.

<sup>224</sup>Noam Zohar, "Repentance and Purification: The Significance and Semantics of *ht't* in the Pentateuch," *Journal of Biblical Studies* 107:4 (1988):615, n. 31.

<sup>225</sup>For a survey of the attitudes of American Jews over the last century regarding the meaning of the Day of Atonement and regarding death and the afterlife, see Eric Friedland, "The Atonement Memorial Service in the American Mahzor," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 55 (1984):243-82.



"The only way of access into the presence of the LORD is by the application of the atoning blood on the mercy seat and the removal of the sins of the penitent by placing them on a scapegoat."<sup>226</sup>

## **II. THE PRIVATE WORSHIP OF THE ISRAELITES CHS. 17—27**

The second major division of Leviticus deals with how the Israelites were to express their worship of Yahweh in their private lives. These exhortations to holiness show that every aspect of the life of God's people have to be set aside to God.

"The first sixteen chapters of Leviticus are concerned primarily with establishment and maintainance [*sic*] of the relationship between Israel and God. . .

"In chapter 17, the emphasis shifts to the affairs of the everyday life of the Israelites as God's holy people."<sup>227</sup>

In critical circles, scholars are fond of referring to chapters 17—26 as the Holiness Code.<sup>228</sup>

"Leviticus 17—26 has been called the Holiness Code because of the frequency of the occurrence of the phrase, attributed to Yahweh: 'You shall be holy because I am holy,' which corresponds to the theological theme of the other priestly laws but here receives a special emphasis. One other phrase is characteristic of these chapters: 'I am Yahweh' (sometimes 'I am Yahweh your God')."<sup>229</sup>

"The section is not as distinctive as some scholars imagine; but it is characterized by moral and ethical instruction (with one chapter on the annual feasts), and it does base moral obligation in the nature of God. This last point is not unique, however. The Ten Commandments are prefaced by the statement 'I am the Lord your God' (Exod 20:2), and a typical 'Holiness Code' phrase has already been pointed out in Leviticus 11:44."<sup>230</sup>

"The unique feature of the Holiness Code is the fact that in its introduction and throughout its laws, the audience it addresses is not the priests as such but the whole of the congregation. It calls the entire people of God to holiness. As has long been observed, the Holiness Code is not attached directly to the Priestly Code [Exod. 35—Lev. 16]. Between these two legal codes lies a striking account of Israel's offering sacrifices to 'goat

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<sup>226</sup>Ross, p. 323.

<sup>227</sup>Schultz, p. 91.

<sup>228</sup>E.g., Martin Noth, *Leviticus: A Commentary*, pp. 127-28.

<sup>229</sup>R. Norman Whybray, *Introduction to the Pentateuch*, p. 130.

<sup>230</sup>Harris, p. 592.

idols' (Lev 17:1-9). Though brief and somewhat enigmatic, this short fragment of narrative, usually taken to be the work of the final composer, portrays the Israelites forsaking the tabernacle and sacrificing 'outside the camp.' The content of the narrative is similar to the incident of the golden calf: the people forsook the Lord and his provisions for worship and followed after other gods—in this case, the 'goat idols.' Unlike the narrative of the golden calf, however, which places the blame on the priesthood, this narrative of the goat idols makes the people, not the priests, responsible for the idolatry. Thus within the logic of the text, the incident of the people's sacrificing to the goat idols plays a similar role to that of the priests' involvement in the golden calf. Just as the narrative of the golden calf marked a transition in the nature of the covenant and its laws, so here also the incident of the goat idols marks the transition from the Code of the Priests to the additional laws of the Holiness Code."<sup>231</sup>

Note how the three major law collections in the Pentateuch fit into the Sinai narrative.<sup>232</sup>

| COVENANT                     |  | COVENANT    |                  | COVENANT                |             |                      |                  |
|------------------------------|--|-------------|------------------|-------------------------|-------------|----------------------|------------------|
| STIPULATION                  |  | STIPULATION |                  | STIPULATION             |             |                      |                  |
| FAILURE                      |  | FAILURE     |                  |                         |             |                      |                  |
| Covenant Established         | Decalogue<br>Covenant Code<br>Tabernacle | Golden Calf | Covenant Renewed | Priestly Code           | Goat Idols  | Holiness Code        | Covenant Renewal |
| Exod. 19;<br>20:18-21;<br>24 | Exod. 20:1-17;<br>20:22—23:33;<br>25—31  | Exod. 32    | Exod. 33—34      | Exod. 35—40;<br>Lev. 16 | Lev. 17:1-9 | Lev. 17:10—<br>25:55 | Lev. 26          |

"The placement of the Holiness Code (Lev 17—26) at this point in the narrative, then, plays an important role in the author's strategy. It aptly shows that God gave further laws designed specifically for the ordinary people. These laws are represented in the Holiness Code. Thus, as is characteristic of the Holiness Code, its laws pertain to specific situations in the everyday life of the people."<sup>233</sup>

### **A. HOLINESS OF CONDUCT ON THE ISRAELITES' PART CHS. 17—20**

All the commandments contained in chapters 17—20 relate to the holiness of the life of every Israelite. Yahweh had brought the Israelites into covenant fellowship with Himself through atonement. Consequently they were to live as holy people different from all other peoples, especially the Canaanites.

<sup>231</sup>Sailhamer, pp. 49-50.

<sup>232</sup>The following chart was adapted from *ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>233</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 59.

### **1. Holiness of food ch. 17**

We move from public regulations in chapter 16 to intimate regulations in chapter 18 with chapter 17 providing the transition. In contrast to the first sixteen chapters, chapter 17 says very little about the role of the priests. The emphasis is rather on mistakes that the ordinary Israelite could make that would affect his or her relationship to God. Food and sacrificial meals were a prominent part of heathen worship. Therefore what the Israelites ate and how they ate it demonstrated their consecration to Yahweh.

"The laws in this chapter deal with various problems connected with sacrifice and eating meat. These matters have already been discussed in chs. 1—7 and 11 (cf. 7:26-27 with 17:10ff. and 11:39-40 with 17:15-16). This chapter draws together themes that run through the previous sixteen: in particular it explains the special significance of blood in the sacrifices (vv. 11ff.)."<sup>234</sup>

17:1-2        These directions pertained to both the priests and the people. Those laws in chapters 18—20 governed the lives of the common people only (cf. 18:2; 19:2; 20:2). Other laws specifically for the priests are in chapters 21—22.

17:3-7        God did not permit the Israelites to slaughter sacrificial animals (v. 5) anywhere except before the altar of burnt offerings. This may seem to us to have created logistical problems. How could the priests handle all those sacrifices? However the Israelites and other ancient Near Eastern people rarely slaughtered animals. They did not eat as much meat as we do. The Israelites lived primarily on manna. They kept animals for producing milk, wool, bearing burdens, and doing hard work. Any Israelite who slaughtered an animal for sacrifice except before the altar would die (v. 4; cf. vv. 9, 10, 14).

"It appears . . . that this phrase ["cut off"] may not only refer to premature death at the hand of God, but hint at judgment in the life to come."<sup>235</sup>

The reasons for so severe a penalty were two. First, each slaughter was to be an offering to God, an act of worship (v. 5). God owned the animal since He had given it life. Second, killing animals was commonly part of a pagan ritual connected with worship of the "goat demon" (v. 7).

The goat demon was a god that the Egyptians and other ancient Near Easterners worshipped. It was supposedly responsible for the fertility of the people, their herds, and their crops. They believed it inhabited the

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<sup>234</sup>Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 240.

<sup>235</sup>Ibid., p. 242. Similarly the Christian who commits a "sin unto death" (1 John 5:16; cf. 1 Cor. 11:30) dies prematurely at God's hand.

deserts. A goat represented this demon (cf. 1 Cor. 10:20), and part of its abhorrent rituals involved goats copulating with women votaries.<sup>236</sup> The Israelites were at this time committing idolatry with this Egyptian god (v. 7). They continued to worship Egyptian deities for many generations (cf. Josh. 24:14) in spite of commandments like this one that should have ended this practice. Even today the goat is a demonic symbol in Satan worship.

"Just as the narrative about the incident of the golden calf revealed the imminent danger of Israel's falling into idolatry, so the present narrative demonstrates the ongoing threat. These two narratives play an important role in the composition of this part of the Pentateuch.

"The two narratives showing the threat of idolatry bracket the detailed legislation dealing with the office of the priest—legislation primarily directed toward preventing further idolatry. The narratives provide the priestly legislation with two vivid examples of Israel's falling away after 'other gods.'"<sup>237</sup>

17:8-9      Verses 8-16 contain three laws that relate to each other and were binding on both the Israelites and the foreigners who lived among them. Apparently God permitted resident aliens to preserve some of their traditional customs.

The same prohibition against slaughtering sacrificial animals applied to the offering of burnt offerings and peace offerings. The Israelites were to offer these sacrifices only at the brazen altar for the reasons already explained.

17:10-14      God also prohibited the ingesting of blood (v. 11; cf. 3:17; 7:26-27; 19:26; Gen. 9:4; Deut. 12:15-16, 23-24; 15:23). From this law the Jews developed methods of draining or washing the blood out of meat that resulted in kosher (meaning fit or proper) meat.<sup>238</sup> The incidence of blood disease among livestock was much higher in ancient times than it is today.<sup>239</sup> Careful observance of this law would have resulted in healthier Israelites as well as obedient Israelites.

Blood is the life-sustaining fluid of the body (vv. 11, 14). It is inherently necessary to maintain animal life, thus the close connection between blood and life. Life poured out in bloodshed made atonement for sin.

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<sup>236</sup>Harrison, p. 180.

<sup>237</sup>Sailhamer, p. 343.

<sup>238</sup>Harrison, p. 181.

<sup>239</sup>Fawver and Overstreet, p. 275.

Consequently the eating or drinking of blood was inappropriate since blood had expiatory value and represented life.

"By refraining from eating flesh with blood in it, man is honoring life. To eat blood is to despise life. This idea emerges most clearly in Gen. 9:4ff., where the sanctity of human life is associated with not eating blood. Thus one purpose of this law is the inculcation of respect for all life."<sup>240</sup>

The animals in view here seem to be those slain in hunting; they were not sacrificial animals (v. 13; cf. Deut. 12:15). However the restriction about eating blood applied to all animals that the Israelites ate. Since God forbade eating blood before the Mosaic Law (Gen. 9:4), which Christ terminated, people today should also refrain from eating it. What is in view is not simply eating "rare" meat (pink or red meat with a little blood in it) but larger quantities of blood either separately or as a kind of side dish. Eating raw, uncooked meat was also inappropriate.

17:15-16      God extended the sacredness of life in this third prohibition by forbidding the eating of clean animals that had died without slaughter. He did so because the blood remained in them. The penalty for the offending Israelite was not as great because the life had departed from the animal. Nevertheless His people were to respect the symbol of life.

"The faithful worshiper of the living God must preserve the sanctity of sacrificial blood, recognizing that life (signified by blood) belongs to God."<sup>241</sup>

In an interesting irony, Jesus taught that His blood gives eternal life and commanded His disciples to drink it (symbolically; cf. John 6:54). Jehovah's Witnesses refuse to receive blood transfusions because of the commands about blood in this chapter.<sup>242</sup>

Chapter 17 introduces the laws that follow in chapters 18—26. Yet chapter 17 is also important in the larger context of the Pentateuch. It presents the Israelite people committing idolatry with the goat idol as the Israelite priests had earlier committed idolatry with the calf idol (Exod. 32). In the golden calf incident the priests led the people in idolatry, but here they opposed the idolatry of the people. The priests had evidently learned from their error and the legislation that God gave following that failure. Additional legislation designed to regulate the priests' behavior followed the priests' failure with the golden calf (i.e., the priestly code, Exod. 35—Lev. 16). Now additional

<sup>240</sup>Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 245. Cf. Hertz, p. 168.

<sup>241</sup>Ross, p. 336.

<sup>242</sup>E. S. Gerstenberger, *Leviticus*, pp. 243-44.

legislation designed to regulate the people's behavior followed the people's failure with the goat idol (i.e., the holiness code, 17:10—25:55).<sup>243</sup>

## **2. Holiness of the marriage relationship ch. 18**

Emphasis shifts in this chapter from ceremonial defilement (ch. 17) to moral impurity. The Lord wanted His people to be holy in their behavior and character as well as in less important ritual observances (cf. Matt. 23:28; Rom. 2:28). The order of the laws in chapters 18—20 may be significant. They set out foundational principles of social morality. Marriage is the cornerstone of all human society.

This chapter reflects the basic structure of a suzerainty treaty with some omissions. It begins with a warning concerning the vile practices of the Egyptians and Canaanites as well as an exhortation to obey God (vv. 1-5). It concludes by alluding to consequences that would overtake the Israelites if they disobeyed Him (vv. 24-30).

"There is a strong polemical thrust in these laws. Seven times it is repeated that the Israelites are not to behave like the nations who inhabited Canaan before them (vv. 3 [2x], 24, 26, 27, 29, 30). Six times the phrase 'I am the Lord (your God)' is repeated (vv. 2, 4, 5, 6, 21, 30)."<sup>244</sup>

18:1-5      The statement "I am the Lord" reminded the people of their covenant relationship with and responsibility to Yahweh.<sup>245</sup> It was because He is who He is that they were to be who He wanted them to be. It was a constant reminder to the Israelites of who they were and whom they served.

"Fundamentally God is holy because He is unique and incomparable. Those whom He calls to servanthood must therefore understand their holiness not primarily as some king [*sic*] of 'spirituality' but as their uniqueness and separateness as the elect and called of God. But holiness must also find expression in life by adhering to ethical principles and practices that demonstrate godlikeness. This is the underlying meaning of being the 'image of God.'"<sup>246</sup>

The promises of life for obedience (v. 5) held out a positive motivation for what follows.

"No, Lev 18:5 does not teach salvation by works. It teaches that the OT believers who trusted God and obeyed him

<sup>243</sup>See Sailhamer, pp. 343-45, for further development of these parallels.

<sup>244</sup>Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 250. The phrase "I am the Lord" becomes a characteristic refrain in Leviticus at this point. It also appears frequently in Exodus and Numbers.

<sup>245</sup>Cf. Walther Zimmerli, *I Am Yahweh*, pp. 2-5.

<sup>246</sup>Merrill, p. 58.

from the heart received life abundant both here and hereafter. Actually, Paul was saying, 'The Pharisees and the Judaizers teach that the law offers salvation by works, but that is a misuse of the law that cannot contradict the promise of grace' (cf. Gal 3:12, 17)."<sup>247</sup>

18:6-18 "To uncover nakedness" means to have sexual intercourse (cf. Gen. 20:12).

"The phrase covers intercourse within marriage and outside it."<sup>248</sup>

"In the unfallen world, nakedness was a symbol of integrity and sinlessness (Gen. 2:25), but in the fallen world, it became a sign of exploitation, captivity, abuse, and shame (3:7, 11)."<sup>249</sup>

Note the parallels between this legislation and the story of Ham looking on his father Noah's nakedness (Gen. 9:20-27). Both acts resulted in a curse (18:24-28; Gen. 9:24-27). Both acts also connect with drinking wine (10:9; Gen. 9:21). God was guarding His people from falling into the same type of sin and its consequences that Ham experienced.<sup>250</sup>

God prohibited intercourse with married or unmarried individuals outside marriage.<sup>251</sup> Moses mentioned twelve different cases in these verses.

"Marriage as a social institution is regarded throughout Scripture as the cornerstone of all other structures, and hence its purity and integrity must be protected at all times."<sup>252</sup>

"After the death of her husband a woman may not marry her brother-in-law [v. 16]. Deut. 25:5ff. states an exception to this principle. Should a woman be widowed before she has borne a son, her brother-in-law has a duty to marry her 'to perpetuate his brother's name' (v. 7). This custom of Levirate, attested elsewhere in Scripture and the ancient Orient, illustrates the paramount importance of having

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<sup>247</sup>Harris, p. 598.

<sup>248</sup>Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 253.

<sup>249</sup>Ross, p. 345.

<sup>250</sup>Sailhamer, p. 346, also suggested that God designed the legislation in chapters 18—20 to guard the Israelites from what humankind did at Babel (Gen. 11:1-9).

<sup>251</sup>In Israel, engaged couples were considered as good as married, though they had not yet consummated their marriage with intercourse.

<sup>252</sup>Harrison, p. 186. Cf. Hertz, p. 172.

children in ancient times. Heirs prevented the alienation of family property and ensured the parents' support in their old age, in times when pensions and other welfare services were unknown."<sup>253</sup>

Translators have made a fairly strong case from philological, literary, and historical considerations for translating verse 18 as follows. "And you shall not take a woman as a rival wife to another. . . ." The Qumran community translated it this way. If this translation is correct, the verse explicitly prohibits polygamy and implicitly prohibits divorce.<sup>254</sup>

"What has troubled biblical scholars for some time are the two major omissions from the list: father-daughter incest and brother-sister incest. Economic reasons might have made these two violations rare in the ancient Israelite world. A virgin daughter brought a good bride-price. If a father violated her, he lost that. A corrupt father more likely turned his attentions elsewhere than to his daughter. This might also apply to a brother, as seen in the case of Laban, the brother of Rebekah, who actually became the head of the family and negotiator for marriage in the place of his father."<sup>255</sup>

18:19-23 God also condemned other kinds of unacceptable sexual behavior including adultery (v. 20), homosexuality (v. 22, cf. 20:13), and bestiality (v. 23).<sup>256</sup> All of these were fairly common practices in the ancient Near East. The Mesopotamians and Hittites generally condemned incest and bestiality, with some exceptions, but not homosexuality.<sup>257</sup>

Molech (v. 21) was a Canaanite god often represented by a bronze image with a bull's head and outstretched arms. The idol was usually hollow, and devotees kindled a fire in it making it very hot. The Canaanites then passed children through the fire (cf. 2 Kings 23:10) or placed them on the hot outstretched arms of the idol as sacrifices (Ezek. 16:20).<sup>258</sup> The Talmud and some modern commentators prefer a translation of verse 21

<sup>253</sup>Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 257.

<sup>254</sup>See Angelo Tosato, "The Law of Leviticus 18:18: A Reexamination," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 46 (April 1984):199-214; Gleason L. Archer Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, p. 259; Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward Old Testament Ethics*, p. 189. John Murray also preferred this interpretation in Appendix B of *Principles of Conduct*, pp. 250-56.

<sup>255</sup>Ross, p. 345. Cf. Hartley, p. 287.

<sup>256</sup>See Sherwood A. Cole, "Biology, Homosexuality, and Moral Culpability," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 154:615 (July-September 1997):355-66.

<sup>257</sup>See Harry A. Hoffner, "Incest, Sodomy and Bestiality in the Ancient Near East," in *Orient and Occident. Essays Presented to Cyrus H. Gordon on the Occasion of His Sixty-fifth Birthday*, pp. 81-90.

<sup>258</sup>Some Velikovskians have identified Molech with Saturn. See Dwardu Cardona, "The Rites of Molech," *Kronos* 9:3 (Summer 1984):20-39.



that prohibits parents from giving their children for training as temple prostitutes.<sup>259</sup>

"To 'profane' means to make something unholy. The object of the verb is always something holy, e.g., God's sanctuary, 21:12, 23; the holy foods (22:15); the sabbath, Isa. 56:2, 6; Ezek. 20:13, 16, etc. Profaning God's name occurs when his name is misused in a false oath (Lev. 19:12), but more usually it is done indirectly, by doing something that God disapproves of (e.g., by idolatry, Ezek. 20:39; by breaking the covenant, Jer. 34:16; by disfiguring oneself, Lev. 21:6). By these actions Israel profanes God's name; that is, they give him a bad reputation among the Gentiles (Ezek. 36:20-21). This is why they must shun Molech worship."<sup>260</sup>

"Homosexual acts [v. 22] are clearly denounced here as hateful to God.<sup>261</sup> The penalty given at 20:13 is capital punishment. They are denounced also in Romans 1:26-27. . . . It is hard to understand how 'gay churches,' where homosexuality is rampant, can exist. Clearly it is possible only where people have cast off biblical authority and teaching."<sup>262</sup>

"The biblical injunctions against homosexuality are clear and repeatedly declared. It must be remembered that AIDS is a *virus*, which is not limited to or caused by homosexuality or drug abuse, since 12 percent of people with AIDS have not practiced these acts. However, the statistics indicate that these disorders are significantly contributing to the epidemic.

"Psychiatrists are not supposed to call homosexuality a 'disorder.' In 1979 the American Psychiatric Association, to which most psychiatrists in the United States belong, voted by a simple majority that homosexuality is no longer a perversion. This vote was prompted by a powerful gay lobby within the association, thought to consist of at least 10 percent of its members. Homosexuals have subsequently used this APA revision to claim that 'even psychiatrists feel that homosexuality is normal.' . . .

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<sup>259</sup>E.g., Norman Snaith, "The Cult of Molech," *Vetus Testamentum* 16 (1966), pp. 123-24; Geza Vermes, "Leviticus 18:21 in Ancient Jewish Bible Exegesis," in *Studies in Aggadah, Targum, and Jewish Liturgy in Memory of Joseph Heinemann*, pp. 108-124.

<sup>260</sup>Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 259.

<sup>261</sup>An "abomination" (vv. 22, 26, 27, 29, 30) is something that God hates and detests (cf. Prov. 6:16; 11:1).

<sup>262</sup>Harris, p. 601.

"Homosexual activity is anatomically inappropriate. The sadomasochistic nature of anal intercourse leads to tears in the anal and rectal linings, thereby giving infected semen a direct route into the recipient's blood supply. In a similar manner a prostitute is more likely to contract AIDS due to tears in her vaginal wall because of repeated intercourse from numerous sexual partners, frequently within the same day. . . .

"Otis R. Bowen, MD, the former Secretary of Health and Human Services on President Reagan's Cabinet, stated, 'Abstinence, monogamy, and avoidance of drugs are no longer just good morals. Now, they are good medical science.'<sup>263</sup> His statement is consistent with the biblical theme of preventive medicine, which emphasizes prohibitions that can curtail the epidemic, rather than stressing the directed *treatment* of the illness."<sup>264</sup>

18:24-30 Sexual immorality defiled the land as well as the people who practiced it (vv. 25, 27). The punishment for these abominations was death (v. 29). This section closes with a reminder that the basis for these laws was the character of Israel's God (v. 30).

The sexual sins to which Moses referred break down the structure of society by breaking down the family. Moreover they evidence a lack of respect for the life and rights of others. Furthermore they cause diseases. By prohibiting them God was guarding His people from things that would destroy them. Destruction and death are always the consequences of sin (Rom. 6:23).

The New Testament writers restated the laws on incest (cf. 1 Cor. 5:1-5), adultery (cf. Rom. 13:9), idolatry (cf. 1 Cor. 10:7-11; Rev. 2:14), and homosexuality (cf. Rom. 1:27; 1 Cor. 6:9). They are binding on us who live under the New Covenant.<sup>265</sup>

"The people of God must remain loyal to their covenant God and not become involved in the abominable practices of the world that God will judge."<sup>266</sup>

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<sup>263</sup>Otis R. Bowen, "Safer Behavior against AIDS Reiterated for Minorities," *American Medical News*, December 11, 1987, p. 59.

<sup>264</sup>Fawver and Overstreet, pp. 283, 284.

<sup>265</sup>J. Daniel Hays, "Applying the Old Testament Law Today," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158:629 (January-March 2001):21-35, explained and advocated "principlizing" as a method of application. This is a very helpful article.

<sup>266</sup>Ross, p. 348.

### **3. Holiness of behavior toward God and man ch. 19**

Moses grouped the commandments in this section together by a loose association of ideas rather than by a strictly logical arrangement. They all spring from the central thought in verse 2: "You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy." This sentence is the motto of Leviticus (cf. 11:44-45; 20:26; Matt. 5:48; 1 Pet. 1:16).

"Every biblical statement about God carries with it an implied demand upon men to imitate Him in daily living."<sup>267</sup>

"Leviticus 19 has been called the highest development of ethics in the Old Testament.<sup>268</sup> This chapter perhaps better than any other in the Bible, explains what it meant for Israel to be a holy nation (Exod 19:6). The chapter stresses the interactive connection between responsibility to one's fellow man and religious piety, the two dimensions of life that were never meant to be separated."<sup>269</sup>

"Developing the idea of holiness as order, not confusion, this list upholds rectitude and straight-dealing as holy, and contradiction and double-dealing as against holiness. Theft, lying, false witness, cheating in weights and measures, all kinds of dissembling such as speaking ill of the deaf (and presumably smiling to their face), hating your brother in your heart (while presumably speaking kindly to him), these are clearly contradictions between what seems and what is."<sup>270</sup>

"Holiness is thus not so much an abstract or mystic idea, as a regulative principle in the everyday lives of men and women. . . . Holiness is thus attained not by flight from the world, nor by monk-like renunciation of human relationships of family or station, but by the spirit in which we fulfill the obligations of life in its simplest and commonest details: in this way—by doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with our God—is everyday life transfigured."<sup>271</sup>

This chapter contains quotations from or allusions to all ten of the Ten Commandments.<sup>272</sup> Its structure is chiasmic. The first and last sections deal with a person's relationship to God (vv. 3-8, 32-36), and the second and fourth with one's relationship to his fellowman (vv. 9-18, 30-31). The central section deals with man's relationship to himself (vv. 19-29).<sup>273</sup> The first half of the chapter contains positive (vv. 3-10) and

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<sup>267</sup>Ronald E. Clements, "Leviticus," in *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, 2:51.

<sup>268</sup>J. West, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 156.

<sup>269</sup>Rooker, p. 250.

<sup>270</sup>Douglas, p. 531. This book compares Israel's ancient laws and modern tribal customs.

<sup>271</sup>Hertz, p. 192.

<sup>272</sup>See the charts in Rooker, p. 252, and Ross, p. 355.

<sup>273</sup>Jonathan Magonet, "The Structure and Meaning of Leviticus 19," *Hebrew Annual Review* 7 (1983):166.

negative (vv. 11-18) commands, and the second half reverses this order with negative (vv. 19-31) and positive (vv. 32-37) commands.<sup>274</sup>

"It is . . . best to view this chapter as a speech to the community—similar to a covenant-renewal message—that draws upon all the main parts of the law to exhort the people to a life of holiness. Its basic principle is the responsibility of love."<sup>275</sup>

### **Holiness precepts 19:1-18**

"This section . . . consists of a list of twenty-one (3x7) laws. These laws are broken up into smaller units by the sevenfold repetition of the phrase 'I am the LORD (your God)' (19:3, 4, 10, 12, 14, 16, 18)."<sup>276</sup>

The clause "I am the Lord" reminded the Israelites that God was their ultimate judge.

19:1-10      Respect for parents and Sabbath observance (v. 3) were the foundations for moral government and social wellbeing respectively.<sup>277</sup>

Idolatry and image making (v. 4) broke the first and second commandments. This verse recalls the golden calf incident (Exod. 32).

Regarding the sacrifices, the main expression of worship, as holy (vv. 5-8) revealed true loyalty to God contrasted with the idolatry of verse 4.

The preceding ideas deal with respect for God. Those that follow emphasize love for one's neighbor that flows from love for God.

The Israelites were not to harvest their fields and vineyards so thoroughly that there would be nothing left (vv. 9-10). Farmers in the Promised Land were to leave some of the crops in the field so the poor could come in and glean what remained. This showed both love and respect for the poor.<sup>278</sup>

"Unfortunately, much activity and much excitement in modern religious activities has a general disregard for the poor and needy. One cannot legitimately give God thanks and praise while ignoring the poor and needy (Heb. 13:15-16)."<sup>279</sup>

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<sup>274</sup>Ross, pp. 354-55.

<sup>275</sup>Ibid., p. 355.

<sup>276</sup>Sailhamer, p. 349.

<sup>277</sup>Compare the fourth and fifth commandments.

<sup>278</sup>See Donald E. Gowan, "Wealth and Poverty in the Old Testament," *Interpretation* 41:4 (October 1987):341-53, for a study of the plight of the widow, the orphan, and the sojourner in Israel. See also 23:22; Job 29:12-13; Isa. 10:2; Zech. 7:9-10.

<sup>279</sup>Ross, p. 360.

19:11-18

"The statements in the law were intended as a reliable guide with general applicability—not a technical description of all possible conditions one could imagine. . . . The 'deaf' and the 'blind' are merely selected examples of all persons whose physical weaknesses demand that they be respected rather than despised."<sup>280</sup>

God commanded proper attitudes as well as correct actions (vv. 17, 18; cf. Matt. 18:15-17; 19:19).<sup>281</sup>

"To take the name of God in vain (KJV [v. 12]) is not merely to use it as a curse word but to invoke the name of God to support an oath that is not going to be kept."<sup>282</sup>

Verses 17 and 18 show that the Mosaic Law did not just deal with external behavior. The second part of verse 17 has been interpreted in two ways. It could mean that one should rebuke his neighbor without hating him in one's heart (NASB). This is explicitly stated in the first part of the verse. Or it could mean that one should rebuke his neighbor so that one might not become guilty of the same sin himself (NIV). This is probably the intent of the second part of the verse.

When Jesus Christ commented on verse 18 in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:43), He did not invest it with a new spiritual meaning. He corrected the Pharisees' interpretation of it that limited it to external action.<sup>283</sup>

### **Statutes and judgments 19:19-37**

"This section is introduced with the admonition 'You shall keep my statutes' (v. 19a) and concludes with a similar admonition, 'You shall keep all my statutes and all my judgments' (v. 37a), and the statement 'I am the LORD' (19:37b). Like the preceding section of laws, it consists of a list of twenty-one (3x7) laws. These laws also are broken up into smaller units by a sevenfold repetition of the phrase 'I am the LORD (your God)' (19:25, 28, 30, 31, 32, 34, 36)."<sup>284</sup>

<sup>280</sup>G. D. Fee and D. Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth*, p. 155.

<sup>281</sup>See Luke Johnson, "The Use of Leviticus 19 in the Letter of James," *Journal of Biblical Literature* (1982):391-401. Cf. Lev. 19:2 and James 5:12; Lev. 19:13 and James 5:4; Lev. 19:15 and James 2:1 and 9; Lev. 19:16 and James 4:11; Lev. 19:17b and James 5:20; Lev. 19:18a and James 5:9; and Lev. 19:18b and James 2:8.

<sup>282</sup>Harris, p. 604.

<sup>283</sup>A common modern perversion of this "second greatest commandment" is that it implies that we must learn to love ourselves before we can love others. For refutation of this view, see Robert L. Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics*, pp. 130-31.

<sup>284</sup>Sailhamer, p. 351.

19:19-32 The opening words of this section indicate a change of subject.

God called on His people to honor the order of nature by not mixing things that God had separated in creation (v. 19).

"Most of the ancient Near Easterners believed that all things that came into being were *born* into being. This was a major tenet of their belief system. They believed that not only animals were born, but also plants. (This is the reason that they 'sowed their field with two kind of seed,' i.e., male and female seed as they thought of it; see Lev. 19:19.)"<sup>285</sup>

God probably intended these practices to distinguish the Israelites from the Canaanites too.<sup>286</sup>

"As God separated Israel from among the nations to be his own possession, so they must maintain their holy identity by not intermarrying with the nations (Deut. 7:3-6)."<sup>287</sup>

Yahweh upheld the rights of slaves (vv. 20-22). A man was not to mix with a female slave engaged to another man by having sexual intercourse with her. The Israelites considered engaged people virtually married.

By allowing three years to pass before someone ate the fruit on a tree the tree could establish itself and be more productive in the long run (vv. 23-25).

God's people were to avoid pagan practices that characterized the Canaanites (vv. 26-32). These included eating blood (v. 26), cutting their hair in the style of the pagan priests (v. 27), and disfiguring their bodies that God had created (v. 28). They were not to disfigure the divine likeness in them by scarring their bodies. These foreign practices also included devoting one's daughter to prostitution (v. 29), seeking knowledge of the future from a medium (v. 31), and failing to honor the aged (v. 32).

". . . there are indications of ancestor worship in Old Testament times but there was no ancestor worship in Israel."<sup>288</sup>

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<sup>285</sup>Douglas Stuart, *Ezekiel*, p. 181.

<sup>286</sup>See Calum Carmichael, "Forbidden Mixtures," *Vetus Testamentum* 32:4 (September 1982):394-415.

<sup>287</sup>Wenham, *The Book . . .*, pp. 269-70.

<sup>288</sup>Andrew Chiu, "Is There Ancestor Worship in the Old Testament?" *Evangelical Review of Theology* 8:2 (October 1984):221.

That is, God did not permit it, though the Israelites may have practiced it to a limited extent as a result of pagan influence.

Verse 30 prohibits seeking special knowledge either from the dead in general or from dead relatives (familiar spirits, spirits with whom the one praying had previous personal acquaintance).

19:33-37 This list concludes with commands to practice honesty in judicial matters. Verse 37 is a summary exhortation.

Since the church contains people of every nation it is no longer necessary for Christians to observe the laws that typified Israel's uniqueness among the other nations. Nevertheless God still calls Christians to imitate Himself (cf. Matt. 5:48; 1 Cor. 11:1), to "be holy, for I am holy" (1 Pet. 1:16). Application of the imperatives in this chapter is different for Christians, but the fundamental principles of holy living remain the same.

"God's people must conform to his holiness by keeping his commandments (the letter of the law), by dealing with others in love (the spirit of the law), by living according to the standards of separation in the world, and by demonstrating kindness and justice to others."<sup>289</sup>

#### **4. Punishments for serious crimes ch. 20**

The preceding two chapters specify correct behavior. This one sets forth the punishments for disobedience. Chapters 18—19 already discussed most of the subjects dealt with in this chapter.

"The difference between the laws in this chapter and previous ones lies in their form. Those in chs. 18—19 are apodictic in form; that is, they forbid or command certain types of behavior but they rarely indicate what the consequences of disregarding these rules would be. In contrast, the laws in this chapter are casuistic; that is, they state what must be done should one of the apodictic rules be broken. They set out what will befall a law-breaker in such a case. In this way they supplement and reinforce what is found in earlier chapters."<sup>290</sup>

"Although the content of Leviticus 18 and 20 is virtually identical, it is possible to make a distinction between the intended audiences of the chapters. Whereas Leviticus 18 addresses the would-be offender of a God-given decree, Leviticus 20 addresses the Israelite community, which was responsible for seeing that violations of Law receive their just reward."<sup>291</sup>

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<sup>289</sup>Ross, p. 365.

<sup>290</sup>Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 277.

<sup>291</sup>Rooker, p. 265.

"This selection of laws consists of fourteen (7x2) laws, concluded by an extended appeal for holiness on the part of the nation when they take possession of the land of Canaan (vv. 22-26). After the conclusion, one of the laws, the prohibition of mediums and spiritists (v. 6), is restated (v. 27)."<sup>292</sup>

20:1-8 Idolatry and spiritism are the focus of this section. The people were to execute a Molech worshiper by stoning. If they failed to put him or her to death, God Himself would judge the guilty person with death. He would do this to the person who resorted to mediums or spiritists too since this practice sought information about the future from evil spirits rather than from God.

20:9-21 Cursing parents was also punishable by stoning.

Stoning ". . . was the usual punishment appointed in the law for cases in which death was inflicted . . ."<sup>293</sup>

Several sexual sins described here drew this penalty. The law banned the marital unions alluded to in verses 14, 17, and 21. Consequently these verses may be referring to common law marriages in which people lived together as husband and wife without a wedding ceremony.<sup>294</sup> Burning the criminals (v. 14) took place after their execution to heighten the general perception of the wickedness of their sin (cf. Gen. 38:24; Lev. 21:9; Josh. 7:15, 25). It also symbolically cleansed the camp of defilement by removing their remains.<sup>295</sup>

God would judge these sexual sins not by withholding children from the guilty parties but by regarding the children born of such unions as illegitimate. Such children would not benefit their families, which was a great calamity in Israel's world (cf. 1 Chron. 3:17-18; Jer. 22:30; 36:30).<sup>296</sup>

"Whereas in certain respects OT penal law was much more lenient than that of neighboring contemporary cultures, it was more strict with regard to offenses against religion and family life."<sup>297</sup>

20:22-27 This chapter, as chapter 18, concludes with an exhortation and warnings to obey God's ordinances. In view of Israel's unique vocation in the world,

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<sup>292</sup>Sailhamer, p. 353.

<sup>293</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, 2:426.

<sup>294</sup>Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 280.

<sup>295</sup>Ross, p. 386.

<sup>296</sup>See *ibid.*, p. 377; Hartley, pp. 328-29.

<sup>297</sup>Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 179. This author wrote a helpful excursus on "Principles of Punishment in the Pentateuch," pp. 281-86.



the nation was to live differently from other peoples. The Israelites would possess the Promised Land to the extent that they maintained their holiness.

No matter how lightly the Israelites may have regarded the type of conduct reflected in this chapter, in God's sight it constituted serious sin and deserved the severest punishment.

"This theme runs through chs. 11—20: the elect people of God must visibly embody the character of God. In their choice of food, in sickness and in health, in their family life, in their honest and upright dealing, and in their love of neighbor, they show the world what God is like."<sup>298</sup>

"God's people must avoid the world's false religious systems and immoral practices and follow after the LORD's holy plan."<sup>299</sup>

### **B. HOLINESS OF THE PRIESTS, GIFTS, AND SACRIFICES CHS. 21—22**

All the people were to maintain holiness before God, but the priests had higher standards because of their privileges in relationship to God. Moses explained these higher regulations in this section of two chapters.

"The thrust of this section [21:1—22:16] is twofold: the office of a priest is holy, and the office is above the man. A priest must be holy in body, upright in conduct, and ceremonially clean; for he is the representative of God."<sup>300</sup>

This section also contains the requirements for sacrificial animals because the sacrificial animals were the "priests" of the animal world. Many of the deformities that kept a priest from offering sacrifice (21:18-20) are the same as those that kept an animal from qualifying as a sacrifice (22:20-24). Sacrificial animals corresponded to the priests, clean animals to the Israelites, and unclean animals to the Gentiles.<sup>301</sup>

A formula statement, "For I am the Lord who sanctifies them," or a similar affirmation, closes each of the six subsections (21:8, 15, 23; 22:9, 16, 32).

#### **1. The first list of regulations for priests 21:1-15**

"The list has a brief introduction (v. 1) and ends with the introduction to the next list (v. 16). There are fourteen (7 x 2) laws in the list."<sup>302</sup>

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<sup>298</sup>Ibid., pp. 342-43.

<sup>299</sup>Ross, p. 378.

<sup>300</sup>Harris, p. 616.

<sup>301</sup>Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 290.

<sup>302</sup>Sailhamer, p. 354.

21:1-6 The priest was not to defile himself ceremonially by touching a corpse except in the case of his nearest relatives. Shaving the head, probably above the forehead (Deut. 14:1), shaving the edges of the beard, and self-mutilation were practices of pagan priests who demonstrated mourning in these ways (cf. 1 Kings 18:28).<sup>303</sup>

"As in other parts of the ancient Near East [besides Sumeria] priests' heads were normally shaved and no beard was worn."<sup>304</sup>

Defacing the human body was unacceptable because physical perfection symbolized holiness. The priests of Israel were neither to appear nor to behave as pagan priests.

21:7-9 The priests' marriages and home life were to be in keeping with their holy vocation.

"Very awful is your responsibility if you diminish your zeal, love, spirituality, by marrying one who has more of earth and a present world in her person and spirit, than of heaven and a coming eternity."<sup>305</sup>

Priests could not marry prostitutes or divorced women but only virgins or widows of spotless character.<sup>306</sup>

"However innocent the divorced woman was in fact, her reputation was likely to have been affected by the divorce."<sup>307</sup>

The bride of a priest could not be a Canaanite or an idolater, but she could be a foreigner. The priests' children were to lead upright lives too.

"The conduct of the family is noticed by the world, and they lay the blame of their [the children's] misdeeds at the door of their parents. . . . They [the children] hinder the usefulness of their father, who loses influence in the eyes of the world if his counsels and walk have not succeeded in

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<sup>303</sup>See M. Bayliss, "The Cult of Dead Kin in Assyria and Babylon," *Iraq* 35 (1973):115-25.

<sup>304</sup>G. Herbert Livingston, *The Pentateuch in Its Cultural Environment*, p. 107.

<sup>305</sup>Bonar, p. 375.

<sup>306</sup>Joe M. Sprinkle, "Old Testament Perspectives on Divorce and Remarriage," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40:4 (December 1997):540-41, argued that the prohibition against priests marrying nonvirgins had to do with contracting ceremonial impurity, not morality. But marrying a nonvirgin did not necessarily render a man ceremonially unclean.

<sup>307</sup>Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 291.

drawing his own family to God [cf. 1 Tim. 3:11; Titus 1:6]."<sup>308</sup>

21:10-15 It was inappropriate for the high priest to uncover his head in mourning since the holy oil had anointed it. He was not to tear his clothes either (cf. Matt. 26:65). He could not marry a widow or a foreigner as the other priests could. He was not to abandon his duties to conduct other business temporarily. He was not to "profane his offspring" (v. 15) by marrying someone unsuitable to his position before God.

## **2. The second list of regulations for priests 21:16-24**

"This list is introduced by the expression 'And the LORD spoke to Moses saying, Speak to Aaron' (v. 16), and is concluded by the expression 'And Moses spoke to Aaron' (v. 24). There are fourteen (7 x 2) laws in the list."<sup>309</sup>

Certain restrictions applied to priests who were physically defective. They could not enter the holy place or offer sacrifices at the altar of burnt offerings. Handicapped priests were not inferior spiritually, but the priest's duties and office required completeness since the priest stood between God and people.

". . . the priests can be most effective in God's service only when they are in ordinary health and free from physical imperfections."<sup>310</sup>

The priests' physical condition also had to display the perfection of God's creation, just like the animal sacrifices. Physical wholeness symbolized spiritual holiness.

## **3. The third list of regulations for priests 22:1-33**

The previous section (21:16-24) named physical impediments that prohibited some priests from offering sacrifices. This one identifies the circumstances under which priests could neither officiate at the sacrifices nor eat priestly food.

Twenty-eight selected laws (7 x 4) compose this section.

### **Things that profane a priest 22:1-9**

A selection of seven laws appears between a brief introduction (vv. 1-2) and a conclusion (v. 9). The priests could, of course, become defiled like any other Israelites, but no priest who had become ceremonially unclean was to touch or eat the holy things (the furniture, sacrifices, etc.).

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<sup>308</sup>Bonar, p. 376.

<sup>309</sup>Sailhamer, p. 355.

<sup>310</sup>Harrison, p. 211.

### **Persons who could not eat the sacred offerings 22:10-16**

Another list of seven laws guarded the offerings. No non-priest could eat the sacrifices the priests ate except those who had become members of the priests' households. The principle appears at the beginning and at the end of the list (vv. 10, 13b) with a brief statement regarding restitution for accidentally eating an offering following (vv. 14-16). All these regulations guarded the holiness of God by treating the people and things most closely associated with Him as special.

"Those whom God has called to be spiritual leaders must reflect the holiness of the LORD in all they do and exemplify the faith in the eyes of the congregation."<sup>311</sup>

### **The offerings of the priests 22:17-25**

Another list of seven selected laws appears with the principle stated at the end (v. 25). Certain animals were not acceptable as sacrifices under any circumstances. Other animals were acceptable for some sacrifices but not for others. Generally the more important the offering the higher were the requirements for the sacrificial animal. Only the best sacrifices were suitable for presentation to the Lord since He is worthy of only the very best.

### **The time intervals of sacrifices 22:26-33**

Seven additional laws specified the time periods that governed the offering of some sacrifices. The Israelites were not to offer oxen, sheep, and goats as sacrifices before these animals were eight days old (v. 27). It took these animals this long to attain the strength and maturity necessary for them to represent the offerer adequately. The people were not to slay parent animals on the same day as their offspring (v. 28). The reason may have been ". . . to keep sacred the relation which God had established between parent and offspring."<sup>312</sup> Another explanation is that this ruling simply conserved the animal stock that would have become depleted otherwise.<sup>313</sup>

Moses repeated reasons for these regulations again (vv. 31-33) so the Israelites would know why God instructed them as He did (cf. 1 Tim. 3:2).

"These chapters like many others in this book form the background to much NT teaching. Christ is both perfect priest (21:17-23; Heb. 7:26) and perfect victim (22:18-30; Heb. 9:14; 1 Pet. 1:19; 2:22). His bride (cf. 21:7-15) is the Church, whom he is sanctifying to make her 'without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish' (Eph. 5:27; cf. Rev. 19:7-8; 21:2)."<sup>314</sup>

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<sup>311</sup>Ross, p. 388.

<sup>312</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, 2:437.

<sup>313</sup>Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 296; Ross, pp. 393-94.

<sup>314</sup>Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 296.

"Those who worship the redeeming, sanctifying LORD God must come into his presence with acceptable offerings."<sup>315</sup>

### **C. SANCTIFICATION OF THE SABBATH AND THE FEASTS OF YAHWEH CH. 23**

God considered the Israelites (chs. 17—20), the priests, the holy gifts, and the sacrifices (chs. 21—22) as set apart to Him as holy. He regarded certain days and times of the year in the same way (ch. 23). This chapter contains a list of seven festal days and periods of the year when the Israelites were to celebrate holy meetings. These were normally convocations (v. 2) when the Israelites assembled around the tabernacle area. The recurring phrases "holy convocations" and "rest days" indicate that this calendar was primarily for the benefit of the ordinary Israelites rather than for the priests.

"There must be days set apart from the calendar of 'secular,' self-serving activity so that the servant people might ponder the meaning of their existence and of the holy task to which they had been called."<sup>316</sup>

The Israelites observed a solar year, which contains 365 days, and a lunar month. Lunar months have 29 and 30 days alternately. The Egyptians followed these alternations carefully giving them six months of 29 days and six months of 30 days. The Israelites followed the Mesopotamians, however, who observed 12 months of 30 days. All three civilizations made up the difference between 12 lunar months and one solar year by inserting another month after several years.<sup>317</sup>

The chapter begins with an introduction (vv. 1-2) that bears repetition at the end (v. 44).

#### **1. The Sabbath 23:1-3**

The Sabbath (v. 3) was, of course, a weekly observance in contrast to the other feasts that occurred only once a year. Moses introduced the annual holidays in verse 4. God had prescribed Sabbath observance earlier (Exod. 20:8-11; 31:13-17; 35:2-3; Lev. 19:3). Evidently Moses included it in this list because, like the feasts, it was a day set apart to God for holy purposes. The Sabbath was a "convocation" in that the people assembled in spirit to remember God's work for them that resulted in their being able to rest. For this convocation the Israelites did not assemble around the tabernacle but observed the day in their own dwellings.

The Sabbath was the heart of the whole system of annual feasts in Israel. The other feasts all related to the central idea of rest that the Sabbath epitomized. They focused the Israelites' attention on other Sabbath-like blessings that Yahweh provided for them.<sup>318</sup>

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<sup>315</sup>Ross, p. 394.

<sup>316</sup>Merrill, p. 59.

<sup>317</sup>See Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, Part I, Chapter 2: "Divisions of Time."

<sup>318</sup>See Timothy K. Hui, "The Purpose of Israel's Annual Feasts," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147:586 (April-June 1990):143-54.

"Jesus claimed that 'the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath' (Mk 2:28); he could therefore abolish the sabbath, and he did in fact do so, for the New Covenant which he brought abrogated the Old Covenant, of which the sabbath was the sign. The Christian Sunday is not in any sense a continuation of the Jewish sabbath. The latter closed the week, but the Christian Sunday opens the week in the new era by commemorating the Resurrection of our Lord, and the appearances of the risen Christ, and by directing our attention to the future, when he will come again. And yet Sunday does symbolize the fulfillment of those promises which the sabbath foreshadowed. Like all the other promises of the Old Testament, these promises too are realized not in an institution, but in the person of Christ: it is he who fulfills the entire Law. Sunday is the 'Lord's Day,' the day of him who lightens our burdens (Mt 11:28), through whom, with whom and in whom we enter into God's own rest (He 4:1-11)."<sup>319</sup>

"Christians are not merely to give one day in seven to God, but all seven. Since they have entered the rest of God, every day should be sanctified. But they have to set apart some time to be used in voluntary gratitude for worship and ministry and for the rest of body, soul, and spirit."<sup>320</sup>

"God's people witness to their participation in the covenant [Old or New] by ceasing their labors and joining the believing community in the celebration of the LORD's Sabbath rest."<sup>321</sup>

## **2. The Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread 23:4-8**

Verse 4 introduces the seven annual festivals. Whereas the Sabbath could be observed anywhere, the other feasts required attendance at the central sanctuary for participation.

In one sense the Passover (Heb. *Pesah*, v. 5) was the most important feast (cf. Exod. 12:1-28). It commemorated God's deliverance of Israel from Egyptian slavery by a powerful supernatural act and His preparation of the nation for adoption as His special treasure.

Jesus died as the Paschal Lamb on Passover in the year He died for our sins (John 19:14; Matt. 26:17-29; cf. 1 Cor. 5:7; 1 Pet. 1:18-19).<sup>322</sup>

The Passover was primarily a time when Israel commemorated the Lord's deliverance from bondage in Egypt. Likewise our worship should include a commemoration of our past salvation from the bondage of sin (cf. Matt. 26:26-29).

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<sup>319</sup>de Vaux, 2:483.

<sup>320</sup>Ross, p. 405.

<sup>321</sup>Ibid., p. 403.

<sup>322</sup>For the prophetic significance of all of these feasts, see Terry Hulbert, "The Eschatological Significance of Israel's Feasts" (Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1965).

"It is noteworthy that the object of faith was not the typology of the sacrifices . . . or a consciousness of the coming Redeemer, but God Himself."<sup>323</sup>

The day after the Passover marked the beginning of the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread (vv. 6-14; cf. Num. 28:16-25). This was one of the three feasts that all the adult males in Israel had to attend along with the feasts of Firstfruits and Tabernacles (Exod. 23:17; Deut. 16:16). It was a holy convocation or gathering together of the nation around the sanctuary.

This feast reminded the believing Israelite that he needed to live a clean life since God had redeemed him by the blood of the Passover lamb (cf. 1 Cor. 5:6-8; Gal. 5:9).

"God requires his people to preserve their spiritual heritage through the commemoration of their redemption and the life of purity to follow."<sup>324</sup>

### **3. The Feast of Firstfruits 23:9-14**

The Feast of Firstfruits included the presentation of firstfruits of the spring barley harvest in the Promised Land. The Israelites also offered a lamb, flour, and wine, all representative of God's provisions of spiritual and physical food and drink for His people (vv. 9-14). They presented this offering on the day after the Sabbath following Passover. The ancients regarded the firstfruits (Heb. *Shavuot*) as a kind of down payment with more to follow.

Jesus arose from the grave on this day as the firstfruits of those who sleep in death (1 Cor. 15:20).

In modern times it is customary for observant Jews to stay up the entire night of *Shavuot* studying and discussing the Torah. The tradition that the Israelites had fallen asleep the night before God gave them the Torah and Moses had to awaken them is the basis of this custom.

"In order to acknowledge that the LORD provides the needs of their life, God's people must present the first of their income to him as a token of their devotion."<sup>325</sup>

### **4. The Feast of Pentecost 23:15-22**

This festival had several names: Harvest, Weeks (Heb. *Shabuoth*), and Pentecost (Gr. *pentekostos*, meaning "fiftieth"). It fell at the end of the spring harvest 50 days after Passover, namely, the day after the end of the seventh week. Pentecost means fiftieth day.

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<sup>323</sup>Lindsey, p. 165.

<sup>324</sup>Ross, p. 413.

<sup>325</sup>Ibid., p. 418.

This feast was a thanksgiving festival, and it lasted one day. The people offered God the first fruits of the harvest as a thank offering for His provision for their physical and spiritual needs.

The loaves of bread that the Israelites offered to God (v. 17) contained leaven.

"... in them their daily bread was offered to the Lord, who had blessed the harvest..."<sup>326</sup>

These were common loaves of daily bread. The Israelites did not cook them specifically for holy purposes. They also presented other accompanying offerings (vv. 18-19). The evidence of true gratitude is generosity, so the Israelites were to leave the corners of their fields unharvested so the poor could glean (cf. 19:9-10; Deut. 24:19-21).

God sent the Holy Spirit to indwell believers permanently as the firstfruits of God's blessings on Christians on the Pentecost following our Lord's death and resurrection (Acts 2).

This feast was primarily a time of appreciation for God's present provisions and care. Likewise our worship should include appreciation for these mercies as well.

"In thanksgiving for God's bounty, God's people must give him a token of what his bounty has produced and make provision for the needs of the poor."<sup>327</sup>

### **5. The Feast of Trumpets 23:23-25**

During the seventh month of Israel's religious calendar three festivals took place. This reflects the importance that God attached to the number seven in the Mosaic economy. Not only was the seventh day special (v. 3) but so were the seventh week (vv. 15-22) and the seventh month.

The Jews celebrated the Feast of Trumpets (Heb. *Rosh Hashana*) on the first day of this month.<sup>328</sup> After the Babylonian captivity the Jewish civil year began on this day. It became a new year's celebration in Israel's calendar.<sup>329</sup>

The ram's horns (shophars) that the priests blew on this occasion were quite large and produced "a dull, far-reaching tone."<sup>330</sup> They called the congregation to turn attention

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<sup>326</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, 2:443.

<sup>327</sup>Ross, p. 424.

<sup>328</sup>The Israelites blew trumpets on the first day of every month, but on this month the trumpets signaled the Feast of Trumpets as well as the beginning of a new month.

<sup>329</sup>We can calculate the Jewish year number at *Rosh Hashana* by adding 3761 to the Christian year number.

<sup>330</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, 2:444.



freshly to God and to prepare for the other two festivals of the month and the 12 months ahead. They also signaled God's working again on behalf of His people.

A trumpet will sound calling Christians to meet the Lord in the air (1 Cor. 15:52; 1 Thess. 4:16-17). It will also assemble the Israelites and herald the Day of the Lord when God will again resume His dealings with His people Israel in Daniel's seventieth week (Jer. 32:37). Some commentators have felt that this event will provide a prophetic fulfillment of the Feast of Trumpets.

"God calls his people away from their earthly labors to join the saints in his presence where they may worship him wholeheartedly."<sup>331</sup>

### **6. The Day of Atonement 23:26-32**

Moses described this day (Heb. *Yom Kippur*) in chapter 16 more fully for the priests' benefit. Here he stressed the responsibilities of the average Israelite.

This day was a fast rather than a feast. The people were to "humble" or "deny" themselves (v. 29), which involved fasting and abstaining from their normal pleasures and comforts (cf. 16:29). God permitted no ordinary work on this day (vv. 28, 30-32). By this He taught the Israelites that the yearly removal of their sins was entirely His work to which they contributed absolutely nothing (cf. Eph. 2:8-9).

The sacrifices the priests made on this day atoned for all the remaining sins of the believing Israelites that other sacrifices did not cover. However the benefits of the Day of Atonement lasted for only one year.

"The principles taught by the Day of Atonement are valid for the New Testament believer: sin must be regularly removed in order for spiritual service and fellowship to take place. Beyond that, sin can only be removed eternally through the sacrifice of Christ made once and for all—not annually."<sup>332</sup>

Prophetically this day will find fulfillment at the second coming of Christ. Then God will purify His people who have returned to Him in repentance and self-affliction as a result of His chastening during the Tribulation period (Zech. 12:10; 13:1; cf. Heb. 9:28).

"The release from the pressure of work and social inequalities, experienced on and through the Sabbath and its sister institutions, could effectively epitomize both past and future divine deliverance."<sup>333</sup>

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<sup>331</sup>Ross, p. 427.

<sup>332</sup>Ibid., p. 431.

<sup>333</sup>Samuele Bacchoicchi, "Sabbatical Typologies of Messianic Redemption," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 17:2 (December 1986):165.

"In order to find spiritual renewal, people must cease their works, humble themselves before God, and draw near to him on the merits of the atoning sacrifice."<sup>334</sup>

### **7. The Feast of Tabernacles 23:33-44**

This feast (Heb. *Sukkot*) was another very joyous occasion for the Israelites. It was the third fall festival. It commemorated the Israelites' journey from Egyptian bondage to blessing in Canaan. Its other names were the Feast of Booths and the Feast of Ingathering. The people built booths out of branches and lived under these for the duration of this eight-day festival as a reminder of their life in the wilderness. They presented many offerings during this holiday (Num. 29:12-38). In this feast the Israelites' looked backward to the land of their slavery and forward to the Promised Land of blessing. The feast opened and closed with a Sabbath. It was primarily a time of joy since God had just recently provided atonement. It was the only festival in which God commanded the Israelites to rejoice, and it revolved around the harvest of grapes and other fall field products.

". . . in the later postexilic period [it] took on something of a carnival atmosphere."<sup>335</sup>

The Israelites will enjoy a similar prolonged period of rejoicing in the Millennium when they will enjoy national blessing as a result of Jesus Christ's atoning work for them (Zech. 14:16). Then the Jews in the millennial kingdom will be believers in Him and therefore redeemed and adopted as His chosen people. However there will be greater blessings on ahead for them in heaven.

God designed this feast primarily as a time of anticipation as well as reflection. Similarly our worship should include the element of anticipation as we look forward to entering into all that God has promised us in the future. The Puritans patterned their Thanksgiving Day feast in New England after this Jewish festival.<sup>336</sup>

"The people of God must preserve in memory how the LORD provided for them throughout the year and how he provided for their ancestors as he led them to the fulfillment of the promises."<sup>337</sup>

"The dozen feasts of the Hebrew calendar [counting those added later in Israel's history] are pitifully few when compared with the fifty or sixty religious festivals of ancient Thebes, for example."<sup>338</sup>

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<sup>334</sup>Ross, p. 432.

<sup>335</sup>Harrison, p. 220.

<sup>336</sup>Harris, p. 629.

<sup>337</sup>Ross, p. 437.

<sup>338</sup>Kenneth Kitchen, *The Bible In Its World*, p. 86.

| FEASTS & FASTS IN THE EARLY HISTORY OF ISRAEL |        |       |                   |  |  |                           |
|---|--------|-------|-------------------|--|--|---------------------------|
| Season  | Month  |       |                   | Day(s) of Month                              | Feast or Fast                                      | Attendance by Adult Males |
|   | Sacred | Civil | Modern            |  |  |                           |
| Spring  | 1      | 7     | March/April       | 14   | <i>Passover</i>                                    | Optional                  |
| Spring  | 1      | 7     | March/April       | 14-20  | <i>Unleavened Bread</i>                            | Required                  |
| Spring  | 1      | 7     | March/April       | The day after the Sabbath following Passover | <i>Firstfruits</i>                                 | Optional                  |
| Spring  | 3      | 9     | May/June          | 4  | <i>Pentecost</i><br>(a.k.a. Harvest, Weeks)        | Required                  |
| Fall  | 7      | 1     | September/October | 1  | <i>Trumpets</i>                                    | Optional                  |
| Fall  | 7      | 1     | September/October | 10   | <i>Day of Atonement</i><br>(the only fast)         | Optional                  |
| Fall  | 7      | 1     | September/October | 15-21  | <i>Tabernacles</i><br>(a.k.a. Booths, Ingathering) | Required                  |

"When we celebrate Good Friday we should think not only of Christ's death on the cross for us, but of the first exodus from Egypt which anticipated our deliverance from the slavery of sin. At Easter we recall Christ's resurrection and see in it a pledge of our own resurrection at the last day, just as the firstfruits of harvest guarantee a full crop later on (1 Cor. 15:20, 23). At Whitsun (Pentecost) we praise God for the gift of the Spirit and all our spiritual blessings; the OT reminds us to praise God for our material benefits as well."<sup>339</sup>

Leviticus does not mention the Feast of Purim (lit. lots) that the Jews added to their calendar later in their history (cf. Esth. 9:20-32). Neither does the Old Testament refer to the Feast of Dedication (Heb. *Hanakkah*) because the Jews instituted it much later in their history. The former feast celebrates the Jews' deliverance from the Persians in Esther's time. The latter feast, often called the Feast of Lights, commemorates the revolt and

<sup>339</sup>Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 306.

victory of the Maccabees (Hasmoneans) against Antiochus Epiphanes of Syria and the rededication of the temple in 165 B.C.<sup>340</sup>

| <b>Relative Intimacy with God (Holiness) under the Old Covenant</b>  |  |  |   |
|--|--|--|---|
| <b>People</b>  | <b>Time</b>  | <b>Space</b>   | <b>Tabernacle Materials</b>   |
| <b>Gentiles</b><br>↓<br><b>Rebellious Israelites</b><br>↓<br><b>Sinful Israelites</b><br>↓<br><b>Unclean Israelites</b><br>↓<br><b>Clean Israelites</b><br>↓<br><b>Levites</b><br>↓<br><b>Nazirites</b><br>↓<br><b>Imperfect Priests</b><br>↓<br><b>Normal Priests</b><br>↓<br><b>High Priest</b><br>↓<br><b>GOD</b> | <b>Ordinary Days</b><br>↓<br><b>First day of New Month</b><br>↓<br><b>Optional Attendance Feasts</b><br>↓<br><b>Required Attendance Feasts</b><br>↓<br><b>Sabbath</b><br>↓<br><b>Day of Atonement</b><br>↓<br><b>GOD</b> | <b>Outer Gentiles</b><br>↓<br><b>Buffer Gentile Nations</b><br>↓<br><b>The Holy Land</b><br>↓<br><b>Camp of Israel</b><br>↓<br><b>Tabernacle Courtyard</b><br>↓<br><b>Holy Place</b><br>↓<br><b>Holy of Holies</b><br>↓<br><b>Ark of the Covenant</b><br>↓<br><b>GOD</b> | <b>Bronze</b><br>↓<br><b>Badgers' Skins</b><br>↓<br><b>Rams' Skins</b><br>↓<br><b>Goats' Skins</b><br>↓<br><b>Scarlet Fabric</b><br>↓<br><b>Fine Linen</b><br>↓<br><b>Silver</b><br>↓<br><b>Gold</b><br>↓<br><b>GOD</b> |

<sup>340</sup>For an interesting article giving the historical background, institution, and customs of this feast plus suggestions for using it as an opportunity to witness to Jews, see Charles Lee Feinberg, "Hanukkah," *Fundamentalist Journal* 5:1 (December 1986):16-18.

#### **D. THE PREPARATION OF THE HOLY LAMPS AND SHOWBREAD 24:1-9**

The connection of these instructions with what precedes is this. The Israelites were not only to offer themselves to Yahweh on special days of the year, but they were to worship and serve Him every day of the year. The daily refueling and burning of the lamps and the uninterrupted presentation of the showbread to Yahweh represented the daily sanctification of the people to their God.<sup>341</sup>

The Israelites donated the oil for the lamps (vv. 1-4). It symbolized them "... as a congregation which caused its light to shine in the darkness of this world ..."<sup>342</sup> These lamps burned through the night, and the priests refilled them daily (cf. 1 Sam. 3:3; 2 Kings 25:30).

In this offering Israel offered its life to God daily for consumption in His service of bringing light to the nations (cf. Zech. 4; Isa. 42:6).

The flour for the twelve loaves of showbread, one for each of the tribes of Israel, was likewise a gift of the people that represented their sanctification to God (vv. 5-9). The flour represented the fruit of the Israelites' labors, their good works. It lay before God's presence continually in the holy place. The addition of incense to the bread (v. 7) represented the spirit of prayer (dependence) that accompanied the Israelites' sacrifice of work. The priests placed fresh loaves on the table of showbread each Sabbath day.<sup>343</sup>

"The devoted service (i.e., faithfully and rightly bringing offerings) of God's people (i.e., people with their offerings, leaders with their actions) ensures that the way to God is illuminated and that provisions from him will continue."<sup>344</sup>

#### **E. THE PUNISHMENT OF A BLASPHEMER 24:10-23**

This is another narrative section of Leviticus (cf. chs. 8—10). Its position in the book must mean that it took place after God had given Moses the instructions about the holy lamps and showbread (24:1-9). This fact underlines that Leviticus is essentially a narrative work. God gave the legal information at specific times and places to meet particular situations in Israel's life.<sup>345</sup> This is how case law developed in Israel.

God evidently preserved the record of this significant incident in Scripture not just because it took place at the time God was revealing these standards of sanctification. It

<sup>341</sup>For other explanations of the placement of chapter 24 in Leviticus, see John R. Master, "The Place of Chapter 24 in the Structure of the Book of Leviticus," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 159:636 (October-December 2002):415-24.

<sup>342</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, 2:451.

<sup>343</sup>Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 3:6:6, wrote that there were two piles of six loaves each. See also Bill Mitchell, "Leviticus 24:6: The bread of the Presence—rows or piles?" *The Bible Translator* 33:4 (October 1982):447-48. He argued for piles too. Schultz, p. 116, preferred rows.

<sup>344</sup>Ross, p. 442.

<sup>345</sup>Wenham, *The Book . . .*, pp. 308-9.

illustrates how God regarded those who despised the very standards He was giving. This event was a warning to the people concerning the seriousness of sanctification just as the death of Nadab and Abihu (ch. 10) was a similar warning to the priests.

The "Name" referred to (vv. 11, 16) was Yahweh, the name by which God manifested His nature to His people. The man's blasphemy consisted of his cursing Yahweh (v. 11), cursing Yahweh in the name of Yahweh,<sup>346</sup> or using Yahweh's name in a curse.<sup>347</sup> Maybe since his father was an Egyptian (v. 10) he did not have the proper respect for Yahweh and did not sanctify Him in thought and speech as God required.

The Jews interpreted this blasphemy as a flippant use of the name Yahweh. The desire to avoid using the name of Yahweh in vain led them to omit the name Yahweh from their vocabularies completely. They substituted "the Name" in its place in conversation and in composition.<sup>348</sup>

When the witnesses placed their hands on the head of the offender (v. 14) they symbolized the transference of the blasphemer's curse, which had entered their ears, back onto the blasphemer's head.

"The emphasis of the narrative is that the 'whole congregation' was responsible for stoning the blasphemer (v. 14). This may be the reason why there is a reminder of the penalty for murder (*lex talionis*) just at this point in the narrative. The narrative thus sets up a contrast between the whole congregation's acting to take the life of a blasphemer and a single individual's (acting as an individual) taking 'the life of a human being' (v. 17). Thus the writer has made an important distinction between capital punishment and murder. Capital punishment was an act of the whole community, whereas murder was an individual act."<sup>349</sup>

The legal principle of limiting retaliation to retribution in kind (an eye for an eye, vv. 19-21, the *lex talionis*, or law of retaliation, Lat. law of the talon, claw) is another evidence of God's grace. In contemporary ancient Near Eastern culture, people commonly took excessive revenge (e.g., Gen. 4:23). A person who took another person's eye, for example, usually suffered death. In the Mosaic Law, God limited the amount of retaliation that His people could take.

"The 'eye for an eye' legal policy . . . is paralleled in the Code of Hammurabi [an eighteenth century B.C. king of Babylon], but there it operated only in the same social class. For a slave to put out a noble's eye meant death. For a noble to put out a slave's eye involved [only] a fine. In Israel its basic purpose was to uphold equal justice for all and a

<sup>346</sup>Dennis Livingston, "The crime of Leviticus XXIV 11," *Vetus Testamentum* 36:3 (July 1986):352-53.

<sup>347</sup>Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 311.

<sup>348</sup>See Keil and Delitzsch, 2:453.

<sup>349</sup>Sailhamer, pp. 360-61. The word "jubilee" probably comes from the Hebrew *yabal*, meaning "to bring [forth]," as in the bringing forth of produce. See Robert North, *Sociology of the Biblical Jubilee*, pp. 96-97.

punishment that would fit the crime. The so-called law of retaliation was intended to curb excessive revenge due to passion and to serve as a block against terror tactics."<sup>350</sup>

"In the code of Hammurabi, property was often considered more important than person; property offenses such as theft were capital crimes. In Israelite law, sins against the family and religion were most serious."<sup>351</sup>

"Retribution is a principal goal of the penal system in the Bible.

"It seems likely that this phrase *eye for eye*, etc. was just a formula. In most cases in Israel it was not applied literally. It meant that compensation appropriate to the loss incurred must be paid out."<sup>352</sup>

Christians should not live on a tit-for-tat basis. Rather totally selfless love should mark our interpersonal relationships (cf. Matt. 5:38-42). However in public life punishment should match the crime (cf. Acts 25:11; Rom. 13:4; 1 Pet. 2:14, 20). This is how God will judge humankind (Luke 12:47-48; 1 Cor. 3:8).

"The Bible doesn't present capital punishment as 'cure-all' for crime. It presents it as a form of punishment that shows respect for law, for life, and for humans made in the image of God."<sup>353</sup>

"God's people must sanctify the name of the LORD (i.e., ensure that the LORD's holy and sovereign character is preserved in the world) because the LORD's righteousness demands that the blasphemer be judged."<sup>354</sup>

#### **F. SANCTIFICATION OF THE POSSESSION OF LAND BY THE SABBATICAL AND JUBILEE YEARS CH. 25**

Chapter 25 concludes the laws God gave the Israelites on Mt. Sinai. It contains the only legislation on the subject of land ownership in the Pentateuch. These laws regarding the Promised Land correspond to the laws Moses previously gave regarding the people of Israel. God owned both the Israelites and the land He was giving them.

"The central theme of this last set of instructions is that of restoration. Israel's life was to be governed by a pattern of seven-year periods, Sabbath years. After seven periods of seven years, in the Year of Jubilee, there was to be total restoration for God's people."<sup>355</sup>

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<sup>350</sup>G. Herbert Livingston, pp. 176-77.

<sup>351</sup>Schultz, p. 118.

<sup>352</sup>Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 312.

<sup>353</sup>Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Holy*, p. 121.

<sup>354</sup>Ross, p. 448.

<sup>355</sup>Sailhamer, p. 361.

### **1. The sabbatical year 25:1-7**

As God ordered the people to rest every seventh day, so He ordered them to let the land rest every seventh year. By resting the people renewed their strength and rejuvenated their productivity in His service. By resting the land's strength likewise revived and its productivity increased. Modern agronomists have supported the practice of allowing land to lie fallow periodically. God did not want the Israelites to work the land "to death" (i.e., to rape their environment). It belonged to God. Ecologists have argued for the same careful use of the environment that God required of His people. By using the land properly the Israelites sanctified their possession of it. They set it apart to God.

The people were to regard the crops that grew up during the sabbatical year as an offering to Yahweh. God told them not to harvest them. He permitted the slaves, hired people, foreign residents, aliens, cattle, and animals (vv. 6-7) to eat freely of what was His.

"From this, Israel, as the nation of God, was to learn, on the one hand, that although the earth was created for man, it was not merely created for him to draw out its powers for his own use, but also to be holy to the Lord, and participate in His blessed rest; and on the other hand, that the great purpose for which the congregation of the Lord existed, did not consist in the uninterrupted tilling of the earth, connected with bitter labour in the sweat of his brow (Gen. iii. 17, 19), but in the peaceful enjoyment of the fruits of the earth, which the Lord their God had given them, and would give them still without the labour of their hands, if they strove to keep His covenant and satisfy themselves with His grace."<sup>356</sup>

"In its overall plan, the Sabbath year was to be a replication of God's provisions for humankind in the Garden of Eden. When God created human beings and put them into the Garden, they were not to work for their livelihood but were to worship . . . So also in the Sabbath year, each person was to share equally in all the good of God's provision (Lev 25:6). In the Garden, God provided for the man and woman an eternal rest (cf. Gen 2:9, the Tree of Life; 3:22b) and time of worship, the Sabbath (Gen 2:3). The Sabbath year was a foretaste of that time of rest and worship. Here, as on many other occasions, the writer has envisioned Israel's possession of the 'good land' promised to them as a return to the Garden of Eden."<sup>357</sup>

"God's people must order their lives to harmonize with their belief that the bounty of the earth they share is from the sovereign Creator of the earth."<sup>358</sup>

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<sup>356</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, 2:457. See N. P. Lemche, "The Manumission of Slaves - The Fallow Year - The Sabbatical Year - The Jubel Year," *Vetus Testamentum* 26 (January 1976):38-59; and Don Blosser, "The Sabbath Year Cycle in Josephus," *Hebrew Union College Annual* (1981):129-39.

<sup>357</sup>Sailhamer, p. 361.

<sup>358</sup>Ross, p. 453.



## **2. The year of jubilee 25:8-55**

"The Jubilee legislation found in Leviticus 25 presents a vision of social and economic reform unsurpassed in the ancient Near East."<sup>359</sup>

The year of jubilee did for the land what the Day of Atonement did for the people. This year removed the disturbance or confusion of God's will for the land that resulted from the activity of sinners eventually. During this year God brought the land back into the condition that He intended for it. The fact that the priests announced the year of jubilee on the Day of Atonement (v. 9) confirms this correspondence.

"The main purpose of these laws is to prevent the utter ruin of debtors."<sup>360</sup>

However this law also remedied the evils of slavery, destitution, and exhausting toil.

### **The observance of the year of jubilee 25:8-12**

The Israelites were to observe the year of jubilee (lit. blowing the ram's horn) every fiftieth year, the year following seven seven-year periods.<sup>361</sup> On the Day of Atonement of that year a priest was to blow the ram's horn (shophar) to announce the beginning of the jubilee year. The use of the ram's horn was significant. With this horn God announced His descent on Mt. Sinai, called Israel to be His people, received them into His covenant, united them to Himself, and began to bless them (Exod. 19:13, 16, 19; 20:18). The year began on the Day of Atonement ". . . to show that it was only with the full forgiveness of sins that the blessed liberty of the children of God could possibly commence."<sup>362</sup>

No sowing or reaping was to take place, as during the sabbatical years (v. 11). God promised to provide for His people as they rested in response to His gracious promise (vv. 18-23).

"As Israel is God's servant, so the land is Israel's servant. As Israel must cease from her daily work and be restored, so the land must cease from its annual work and be restored. Thus there is a horizontal implementation of the vertical covenant relationship; the redemption of Israelites who lost their freedom and property comes in the year of jubilee (Lev. 25:8-12, 28), the fiftieth year."<sup>363</sup>

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<sup>359</sup>Robert Gnuse, "Jubilee Legislation in Leviticus: Israel's Vision of Social Reform," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 15:2 (April 1985):43.

<sup>360</sup>Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 317.

<sup>361</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 319, believed the jubilee was a short year only 49 days long inserted into the seventh month of the forty-ninth year. See the discussion in Ross, pp. 458-59.

<sup>362</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, 2:458.

<sup>363</sup>Herold H. P. Dressler, "The Sabbath in the Old Testament," in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day*, pp. 30-31.

"The Year of Jubilee is not mentioned in the Old Testament outside the Pentateuch. There is no direct biblical evidence regarding its observance in Israel's history, but if its practice was normal, there might have been no occasion to mention it. On the other hand, the apparent failure of Israelites to keep the sabbatical years during the monarchial period (cf. 26:34-35, 43; 2 Chron. 36:20-21) suggests that the Jubilee might also have been violated."<sup>364</sup>

Verse 10 is the motto on the Liberty Bell that hangs in front of Independence Hall in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

### **The effects of the year on the possession of property 25:13-34**

The people were to buy and sell property in view of the upcoming year of jubilee since in that year all property would revert to its original tribal leasees. This special year reminded the Israelites that they did not really own the land but were tenants of God, the true owner (v. 23).

"The relationship of land and people under God is of fundamental importance for understanding the Old Testament and the Jewish people. . . . The Promised Land was a gift from God, not an inalienable right of anyone's to sell or incorporate as they wished."<sup>365</sup>

Only extreme hardship was to force a tenant-owner to release (redeem, v. 24) his land. Moses gave three cases in verses 25, 26-27, and 28 that explain how the people were to do this. A kinsman redeemer could recover the lost property, the seller himself could do so, and the year of jubilee would return it to him. God granted exceptions to the normal rules of release in the cases of property in a walled city (vv. 29-30) and property of the Levites (vv. 32-34).

There are three Old Testament references to the responsibilities of a human kinsman redeemer (Heb. *goel*) in Israel. Additionally the psalmists and other prophets also referred to Yahweh as Israel's redeemer.

1. When a person sold himself or his property because of economic distress, his nearest kinsman should buy back (redeem) the person or his property if he could afford to do so (25:25).
2. Perhaps an Israelite could not afford to pay the ransom price so that he could keep a first-born unclean animal for his own use. In this case his nearest kinsman could do so for him if he could afford it (27:11-13).
3. When someone killed a person, the victim's kinsman redeemer could take the life of the killer under certain circumstances (Num. 35:10-29).

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<sup>364</sup>Lindsey, p. 211.

<sup>365</sup>Walter Riggans, *Numbers*, p. 200.

Bible students often confuse the levirate marriage custom with the kinsman redeemer custom. Levirate marriage involved the marriage of a widow and her husband's brother or nearest relative. This provision existed so God could raise up a male heir who could perpetuate the family line of the widow's former husband (cf. Gen. 38).

### **The effects of the year on the personal freedom of the Israelites 25:35-55**

The Israelites were not to exploit one another (vv. 35-38). They were not to charge one another interest on loans (v. 37; cf. Exod. 22:25; Deut. 23:19-20). This policy would have enabled a poor farmer to buy enough seed for the next year. This law was evidently unique among the ancient Near Eastern nations, though not among smaller tribal groups.<sup>366</sup>

When poor Israelites sold themselves as servants to wealthier Israelites, their masters were to treat them as brothers and not as slaves (vv. 39-43).

"... the original law in the Book of the Covenant [Exod. 21:1-6 and Deut. 15:12-18] had to do with the 'Hebrew' in the social, not ethnic sense, i.e., with the landless man who survived by selling his services to an Israelite household. Lev. 25:39ff., by contrast, deals with the man who is an Israelite landholder but who has been forced by poverty to mortgage it and then to sell his family and himself into the service of a fellow-Israelite."<sup>367</sup>

God permitted the Israelites to own slaves from other nations (vv. 44-46). That they were not to mistreat them goes without saying. Slavery in itself, as the Mosaic Law regulated it, did not violate basic human rights, but the abuse of slaves did.

"In the first place, for one people or person to enslave another is, by that very act, to claim the other as *one's own*; it is in a fundamental sense to claim another's life as *belonging* to oneself. Such a claim, however, flies in the face of the biblical story that we have heard thus far. If the creation narratives of Genesis tell us anything, they tell us that the sovereign source and lord of life is God—and God alone. It is in just that sense that to God—and God alone—all life, 'the work of his hands,' ultimately rightly belongs. Therefore, from the standpoint of these biblical narratives, anyone besides God laying such ultimate claims to another's life would in effect be arrogating to oneself another's prerogatives. In essence, such a one would be making the most presumptuous claim any human being could make—the claim to be God."<sup>368</sup>

<sup>366</sup>See Edward Neufeld, "The Prohibitions Against Loans at Interest in Ancient Hebrew Laws," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 26 (1955):355-412.

<sup>367</sup>Christopher Wright, "What Happened in Israel Every Seven Years?" *Evangelical Quarterly* 56:3 (October 1984):196.

<sup>368</sup>Michael Goldberg, "Expository Articles: Exodus 1:13-14," *Interpretation* 37:4 (October 1983):390-91.

Israelites could also buy back (redeem) their countrymen who had sold themselves as slaves to non-Israelites who were living in the land (vv. 47-55). An Israelite slave could also buy his own freedom. In these cases the Israelites were to calculate the cost of redemption in view of the approaching year of jubilee when all slaves in the land went free anyway.

"The jubilee release does not apply to foreign slaves (vv. 44-46). A theological reason underlies this discrimination: God redeemed his people from Egyptian slavery, to become his slaves (vv. 42, 55). It is unfitting, therefore, that an Israelite should be resold into slavery, especially to a foreigner (cf. Rom. 6:15-22; Gal. 4:8-9; 5:1). The jubilee law is thus a guarantee that no Israelite will be reduced to that status again, and it is a celebration of the great redemption when God brought Israel out of Egypt, so that he might be their God and they should be his people (vv. 38, 42, 55; cf. Exod. 19:4-6)."<sup>369</sup>

The provision of redemption by a kinsman (vv. 47-55) is a very important legal point in the Book of Ruth (cf. also Jer. 32:7-15). Boaz fulfilled the responsibility of a kinsman redeemer by buying Mahlon's land for Ruth. Furthermore he fulfilled the duty of a levir by marrying Ruth.<sup>370</sup>

The system of land ownership in Israel prevented complete capitalism or complete socialism economically. There was a balance of state (theocratic) ownership and private ownership.

We who live under the New Covenant also have a promise from God that if we put His will first He will provide for our physical needs (Matt. 6:25-33).<sup>371</sup>

"The acceptance of God's sovereignty over his people and all their possessions leads to the magnanimous and compassionate treatment of the poor and the destitute, because at the end of the age everyone will be released from bondage."<sup>372</sup>

## **G. PROMISES AND WARNINGS CH. 26**

"In the ancient Near East it was customary for legal treaties to conclude with passages containing blessings upon those who observed the enactments, and curses upon those who did not. The international treaties of the second millennium BC regularly included such sections as part of the text, with the list of curses greatly outnumbering the promises of blessing. In the Old Testament this general pattern occurs in Exodus

<sup>369</sup>Wenham, *The Book . . .*, pp. 322-23.

<sup>370</sup>See Mike Mitchell, "The Go'el: Kinsman Redeemer," *Biblical Illustrator* 13:1 (Fall 1986):13-15.

<sup>371</sup>See North, pp. 213-31, for additional lessons regarding social justice, social worship, personal virtues, and messianic typology that Christians may learn from Israel's jubilee legislation.

<sup>372</sup>Ross, p. 463.

23:25-33, Deuteronomy 28:1-68, and Joshua 24:20. The maledictions of Mesopotamian legal texts or the curses in the treaties of the Arameans, Hittites and Assyrians were threats uttered in the names of the gods which had acted as witnesses to the covenants. That these threats could be implemented was part of the superstitious belief of people in the ancient Near East, and could have had some coincidental basis in fact. For the Israelites, however, there was no doubt that the God who wrought the mighty act of deliverance at the Red Sea will indeed carry out all that He has promised, whether for good or ill. Obedience to His commands is the certain way to obtain a consistent outpouring of blessing, whereas continued disobedience is a guarantee of future punishment."<sup>373</sup>

The blessings and curses in Exodus 23 dealt with the conquest of Canaan, but the blessings and curses in this chapter deal with Israel settled in the land.

### **1. Introduction to the final conditions of the covenant 26:1-2**

Two fundamental commandments, one negative and one positive, introduce this section of blessings (vv. 1-2).

"In terms reminiscent of the inauguration of the covenant at Sinai (Ex. 21:1-4), Yahweh speaks of His uniqueness and exclusivity (Lev. 26:1), a fact that demanded unquestioning loyalty (26:2)."<sup>374</sup>

"The repetition of the term *covenant* in this chapter shows that the author intends it as a summary of the conditions for the covenant reestablished after the incident of the golden calf. Thus, as has been the form throughout God's address to Israel on Mount Sinai, the statement of the conditions of the covenant is prefaced by a reminder of two central laws: the prohibition of idolatry (v. 1) and the call to observe the Sabbath (v. 2). It was through idolatry that Israel first broke the covenant at Sinai. By contrast the Sabbath was to be a sign of Israel's covenant relationship with God."<sup>375</sup>

"All declension and decay may be said to be begun wherever we see these two ordinances despised—the *sabbath* and the *sanctuary*. They are the *outward* fence around the *inward love* commanded by v. 1."<sup>376</sup>

### **2. The blessing for fidelity to the law 26:3-13**

The benefits of faithful obedience to the law of God would be fruitful harvests (vv. 4-5, 10), and security and peace (v. 6) including victory in battle (vv. 7-8) and numerical

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<sup>373</sup>Harrison, pp. 230-31.

<sup>374</sup>Merrill, p. 59.

<sup>375</sup>Sailhamer, p. 364.

<sup>376</sup>Bonar, p. 473.

growth as a nation (v. 9; cf. Gen. 17:7). The obedient would also experience increasing enjoyment of God's presence and fellowship (vv. 11-12).

The Hebrew word translated "dwelling" (v. 11, *miskan*) is the source of the name "Shekinah." Later Jews described God's presence in the most holy place as the Shekinah (cf. Exod. 40:34-38).<sup>377</sup>

These blessings were both material (vv. 3-10) and spiritual (vv. 11-13). Israel enjoyed them in her years in the land to the extent that she remained faithful to the terms of the Mosaic Covenant. They are reminiscent of God's original blessings in the Garden of Eden (cf. Gen. 1:26, 28, 29; 2:8; 3:8).

"But how many of the people in the nation had to live obediently, or how much obedience was expected before the blessings were poured out? The only information that we have to go on is the Old Testament itself. For example, in the case of the city of Sodom (Gen. 18:24-33), God was willing to spare the cities of the area for ten righteous men. We do not know the population involved, but this number suggests that as long as a remnant had an influence for righteousness, judgment would not fall."<sup>378</sup>

"God promises to reward his people with both spiritual and physical blessing if they are faithful to the requirements of the covenant."<sup>379</sup>

### **3. The warning for contempt of the law 26:14-33**

These punishments would come on the Israelites not for individual errors and sins but for a settled contempt for the whole covenant. They manifested such contempt in presumptuous and obstinate rebellion against the law (vv. 14-15).

"In the curses the converse of the blessings is spelled out. It was usual in legal texts for the curses to be much fuller and longer than the blessings section (cf. Deut. 28 . . .). But this disproportion has a positive didactic purpose as well. It is very easy to take the blessings of rain, peace, and even God's presence for granted. It is salutary to be reminded in detail of what life is like when his providential gifts are removed."<sup>380</sup>

Moses revealed five levels or waves of punishment. If Israel did not turn back to God after the first penalties, God would bring the second on them, and so on.

26:14-17      The "terror" spoken of (v. 16) is probably a description of the Israelites' general feeling in response to the particular calamities that follow. These

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<sup>377</sup>Harris, p. 644.

<sup>378</sup>Ross, p. 468.

<sup>379</sup>Ibid., p. 473.

<sup>380</sup>Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 330.

punishments were disease, lack of agricultural fruitfulness, and defeat by their enemies.

- 26:18-20 The second stage of barren land might follow (one curse; cf. 1 Kings 17:1).
- 26:21-22 The third stage would be divine extermination of their cattle and children (two curses).
- 26:23-26 The fourth stage would be war, plagues, and famine (three curses).
- 26:27-33 The fifth stage would be the destruction of the Israelites' families, idolatrous practices and places, land, and nation through dispersion (four curses).

In her history in the land Israel experienced all of these curses because she eventually despised the Mosaic Law. The record of this failure is not consistent. There were periods of revival and consequent blessing. Nevertheless the general course of the nation proceeded downward.

#### **4. The objective of God's judgments in relation to the land and the nation of Israel 26:34-46**

In this section God explained that His discipline for disobedience would be to produce repentance and return to Himself by the Israelites.

- 26:34-39 The length of the Babylonian captivity was 70 years because the Israelites failed to observe 70 sabbatical years in the land (2 Chron. 36:21; cf. Jer. 29:10).
- 26:40-46 Confession springing from humility would restrain God's hand of discipline on Israel (vv. 40-41). Apostasy and consequent judgment would not invalidate God's promises to Abraham (vv. 42-45). Discipline would be a stage in God's dealings with Abraham's seed, but He would not reject His people or cut them off as a nation. These verses are a strong witness to the unconditional nature of the Abrahamic Covenant.

"When Israel was in Egypt and was humbled under the hand of Pharaoh, God remembered his covenant with Abraham and delivered them (Ex 2:24). Similarly, in the future when Israel would humble themselves, God would remember his covenant and deliver his people."<sup>381</sup>

"The New Testament shows that the blessings and curses are still applicable to Israel. Because the people rebelled

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<sup>381</sup>Sailhamer, p. 365.

against the LORD and his Messiah, judgment would fall once again on the holy city of Jerusalem; many of the threatened curses recorded in the law would again fall on the nation (Matt. 24—25; Mark 13; Luke 21). The wars, famines, and scattering of the people announced by Jesus all harmonize with the curses of Lev. 26. Scholars who take a 'replacement' view of the covenant promises made to Israel are satisfied that such curses applied to the nation after the death of Jesus, but they do not also see any fulfillment of the blessings for believing Jews at any time in the future, apart from sharing in the spiritual blessings of the church. There is more to it than that. Biblical scholars must also consider that if only the judgments of God—and not the blessings—are poured out on Israel, then the purpose of the judgments would be lost, and God would be unjust. Romans 11:29 makes it clear that the covenant was not invalidated by Israel's unbelief. They suffered the severest of punishments, but those who turn to the LORD will find salvation (11:26). God can bring nations to repentance and may very well do so with surviving Israel before the end of the age as part of the new creation. The message of the apostles to Israelites (at first) was to repent so that the seasons of refreshing might come (Acts 3:19)."<sup>382</sup>

Verse 46 concludes all the legislation of the Mosaic Covenant that began in Exodus 25, though more specifically it summarizes the material in Leviticus. What follows in chapter 27 is supplementary.

"In order to prevent sin and bring about salvation, God warns people that he will bring judgment upon them for unbelief and disobedience, both in this life and in the life to come."<sup>383</sup>

## **H. DIRECTIONS CONCERNING VOWS CH. 27**

The blessings and curses (ch. 26) were in a sense God's vows to His people. This chapter deals with His people's vows to Him. Another connection between these chapters is that in times of divine discipline (26:14-33) people tend to make vows to God. Chapter 27 shows how God wanted the Israelites to honor their vows.<sup>384</sup>

"The directions concerning vows follow the express termination of the Sinaitic lawgiving (chap. xxvi. 46), as an appendix to it, because vows formed no integral part of the covenant laws, but were a freewill

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<sup>382</sup>Ross, pp. 482-83.

<sup>383</sup>Ibid., p. 482.

<sup>384</sup>Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 336.



expression of piety common to almost all nations, and belonged to the modes of worship current in all religions, which were not demanded and might be omitted altogether, and which really lay outside the law, though it was necessary to bring them into harmony with the demands of the law upon Israel."<sup>385</sup>

"No true worship can end without presenting ourselves and our substance to the Lord, Who provides all our benefits."<sup>386</sup>

"Just as the whole of the giving of the Law at Sinai began with ten commandments, so it now ends with a list of ten laws. The content of the ten laws deals with the process of payment of vows and tithes made to the Lord."<sup>387</sup>

God did not command the Israelites to make vows or to promise anything to Him. However vowing is a natural desire of people who love God or want things from God. Therefore God gave the Israelites regulations that were to govern their vowing and dedicating. Though God did not command vows He expected that once His people made them they would keep them (cf. Prov. 20:25; Eccles. 5:3-5). It may be that part of the purpose of these regulations was to discourage rash swearing by fixing a relatively high price on the discharge and changing of vows.<sup>388</sup>

"A vow to God placed a person or property in a special consecrated relationship which stood outside the formal demands of the law."<sup>389</sup>

Old Testament examples of people who made vows are Jephthah (Judg. 11:30-31) and Hannah (1 Sam. 1:11). Votive offerings were offerings made in payment of vows.

A vow was a promise to give oneself or one's possessions to God so He would bestow some blessing or because He had already bestowed a blessing. People made vows to do something or not do something. Vows were normally temporary. When a person wanted to get back what he had vowed to God he had to pay a certain price to the sanctuary to buy back what he had given to God. This constituted redeeming what the person had vowed.

### **1. Vows concerning persons 27:1-8**

The amount of money that a person had to pay at the end of a vow in which he pledged a person depended on the age and sex of the individual. Some people were worth more in this respect than others.

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<sup>385</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, 2:479.

<sup>386</sup>Louis Goldberg, *Leviticus: A Study Guide Commentary*, p. 143.

<sup>387</sup>Sailhamer, p. 365. The ten laws, which I have combined somewhat for convenience, are in vv. 1-8, 9-13, 14-15, 16-21, 22-25, 26-27, 28, 29, 30-31, and 32-34.

<sup>388</sup>Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 337.

<sup>389</sup>Harrison, p. 235.

"These figures are very large. The average wage of a worker in biblical times was about one shekel per month.<sup>390</sup> It is little wonder that few could afford the valuations set out here (v. 8)."<sup>391</sup>

### **2. Vows concerning animals 27:9-13**

The Israelites could offer animals that the Mosaic Law classed as clean or unclean to God in payment for a vow. The priests probably used the unclean animals for various purposes other than sacrifice, or they could sell them for a profit.

### **3. Vows concerning other property 27:14-29**

God treated houses (vv. 14-15) the same as unclean cattle (cf. vv. 11-12). He calculated land value in relationship to the year of jubilee. The people evidently were to pay for land they inherited and then vowed year by year (vv. 16-21). However they normally were to pay for land they purchased and then vowed in one payment (vv. 22-25). They could not vow first-born animals because these already belonged to God (vv. 26-27). Neither could they vow people or objects that had already been dedicated to God for good purposes (e.g., the spoil of Jericho) or bad purposes (e.g., a condemned murderer; vv. 28-29).

### **4. The redemption of tithes 27:30-34**

God claimed as His possession one tenth of the seed, fruit, and livestock of the Israelites. If the owner wished to keep some of this himself, he had to pay the value of what he kept to God plus 20 percent. This tithe was a commonly recognized obligation to God and for this reason it was not part of the Mosaic Law (cf. Gen. 14:20; 28:22).<sup>392</sup> Probably Moses included the directions concerning it in this section of Leviticus because this tithe was a gift to God.

The Israelites were to devote the Sabbath entirely to God as a reminder that all their days belonged to Him. Likewise they were to tithe their income as a reminder that all their possessions belonged to Him. The tithe was not just the part the Israelites owed God. It was a reminder that they owed everything to God.<sup>393</sup>

"Lev. 27 points out that holiness is more than a matter of divine call and correct ritual. Its attainment requires the total consecration of a man's life to God's service. It involves giving yourself, your family, and all your possessions to God."<sup>394</sup>

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<sup>390</sup>I. Mendelsohn, *Slavery in the Ancient Near East*, p. 118.

<sup>391</sup>Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 338.

<sup>392</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, 2:486. This was one of two tithes the Israelites had to pay (cf. Deut. 14:22-27) the other being the tithe they paid every three years to support the poor (Deut. 14:28-29).

<sup>393</sup>James Philip, *Numbers*, p. 212.

<sup>394</sup>Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 343.

God has given quite different directions to guide the giving of Christians under the New Covenant (cf. 1 Cor. 16; 2 Cor 8—9; Phil. 4). He has not specified a percentage that His people must give. He wants us to give joyfully, sacrificially, proportionately, and as He has prospered us. Teaching Christians to give as God instructed the Israelites under the Old Covenant often has the effect of limiting their giving rather than increasing it. Many Christians erroneously think that when they have given 10 percent they have satisfied God.

"In order to reflect God's faithfulness, God demands that his people be faithful to do all that they vow or promise and be careful that their vows and promises are appropriate."<sup>395</sup>

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<sup>395</sup>Ross, p. 495. The New Testament emphasizes keeping our word more than keeping our vows. All our words should be trustworthy and reliable. This is an important aspect of personal integrity.

## Conclusion

Genesis reveals how people can have a relationship with God. This comes through trust in God and obedience to Him. Faith is the key word in Genesis. God proves Himself faithful in this book.

Exodus reveals that God is also sovereign. He is the ultimate ruler of the universe. The sovereign God provided redemption for people so they could have an even deeper relationship with Himself. Man's response should be worship and obedience.

Leviticus reveals that God is also holy. He is different from people in that He is sinless. The proper human response to this revelation of God's character is worship on the part of sinners. In order for a holy God to have a close relationship with sinful people someone must do something about sin. This is true even in the case of redeemed sinners. Atonement is the solution that God provided.

The first half of Leviticus reveals the laws that the Israelites had to observe in their public life so they could enjoy an intimate relationship with God (chs. 1—16). These included laws concerning sacrifices (chs. 1—7), the priesthood (chs. 8—10), and the means of purification from various defilements (chs. 11—16).

The second half of the book reveals God's provisions for the maintenance of covenant fellowship in private life (chs. 17—25). This involved holiness of conduct by the people (chs. 17—20) and the priests (chs. 21—22) in all their time (ch. 23), their worship (ch. 24), and their land (ch. 25).

The book closes with God formally exhorting the nation to obey and remain faithful to the covenant that He had established (ch. 26). He also gave directions concerning the vows His people would make out of devotion to Him (ch. 27). Obedience would maximize His blessings.

Leviticus focuses on priestly activity, but it is also a great revelation of the character of God and His will to bless people. In it God's people can learn what is necessary for sinners, even redeemed sinners, to have an intimate relationship with a holy God who has entered into covenant with us. These necessities include sacrifice, mediation, atonement, cleansing, purity, etc., all of which Jesus Christ ultimately provided. This revelational value of the book continues even though its regulatory value (i.e., how the Israelites were to behave) ended with the termination of the Mosaic Law (cf. Mark 7:18-19; Acts 10:12; Rom. 7:1-4; 10:4; 14:17; 1 Cor. 8:8; Gal. 3:24; 4:9-11; Col. 2:17; Heb. 9:10).

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